

Psalm 66

“Come And See What God Has Done”

June 18, 2023

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Pentecost Season

Our sermon text this morning is Psalm 66, which is printed on the back of your order of worship.

This is God’s holy and inerrant word. It is more precious than gold, even much fine gold. It is sweeter than honey, sweeter even than the drippings of the honeycomb.

Psalm 66

To the choirmaster. A Song. A Psalm.

1 Shout for joy to God, all the earth;

2 sing the glory of his name;

give to him glorious praise!

3 Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds!

So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you.

4 All the earth worships you

and sings praises to you;

they sing praises to your name.” Selah

5 Come and see what God has done:

he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man.

6 He turned the sea into dry land;

they passed through the river on foot.

There did we rejoice in him,

7 who rules by his might forever,

whose eyes keep watch on the nations—

let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah

8 Bless our God, O peoples;
let the sound of his praise be heard,
9 who has kept our soul among the living
and has not let our feet slip.
10 For you, O God, have tested us;
you have tried us as silver is tried.
11 You brought us into the net;
you laid a crushing burden on our backs;
12 you let men ride over our heads;
we went through fire and through water;
yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance.

13 I will come into your house with burnt offerings;
I will perform my vows to you,
14 that which my lips uttered
and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.
15 I will offer to you burnt offerings of fattened animals,
with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams;
I will make an offering of bulls and goats. Selah

16 Come and hear, all you who fear God,
and I will tell what he has done for my soul.
17 I cried to him with my mouth,
and high praise was on my tongue.
18 If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened.
19 But truly God has listened;
he has attended to the voice of my prayer.
20 Blessed be God,
because he has not rejected my prayer
or removed his steadfast love from me!

Thus far the reading of God's word. It is absolutely true, and it is given to you because your Father in heaven loves you. Let's pray...

Blessed Lord, who caused all the holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear this portion of your word, and to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest these words, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

"The word of God," Hebrews 4 tells us, "Is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thought and intentions of the heart."

Indeed, anyone who has walked with Jesus knows the truth of those words. We do not examine the Scriptures — the Scriptures examine us.

God's word does things to us — it confronts us, it encourages us, it puts us to death and makes us live again.

And the Scriptures do this in different ways. Sometimes the effect of God's word is subtle and complex, and grows slowly over time, surprising us with its power when it is fully unleashed.

But there are some portions of God's word that are not subtle at all, there are some portions that look us in the face and speak to us directly, that call us immediately to repentance and faith.

Our psalm today is like that.

Look at how our psalm this morning begins. It breaks like a thunderclap.

Psalm 66 opens with a series of commands, four quickly stated imperatives directed to the nations of the world, and we must see, us as well.

The psalmist says:

“Shout for joy to God, all the earth!” He continues, *“Sing the glory of his name, give to him glorious praise!”* — notice that these are directives — the psalmist is speaking unabashedly to the nations and calling them to the worship of the true God.

He then goes on to describe for them in verses 3 and 4 what that praise is to consist of. He literally tells them exactly what to say in praise to God.

He says, *“Say to God, ‘How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you. All the earth worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name.’”*

It’s important for us to notice what is happening here.

This psalm is not just a prayer, it is a kind of public sermon, it is a grand exhortation, and the psalmist is not just addressing the nations, he is speaking to you and me as well.

As the Apostle Paul puts it in Acts 17 in his sermon at the Areopagus in Athens, “God commands all people everywhere to repent,” and that exhortation is directed also to us today.

We are those who are commanded by this Psalm to worship and honor God, indeed, to rejoice in God, and it’s worth remembering that the command to worship God is a fundamentally just that — it’s *a command* that is rooted in God’s majesty — in the awesomeness of his deeds and the greatness of his power.

God does not earn our praise, he does not entice us to worship him — no, he commands it of us, and it is just and right for him to do so.

I think it's important for us to see this. Our modern sensibilities encourage us to make our subjective experience the locus of our sense of what deem to be important or reasonable.

But God's call for us to worship him is rooted in his unchanging character, not our variable sense of how things are going.

And our response to his command to worship, rejoice in God and honor him is first and foremost, before all things, an act of obedience to his call.

But having begun with a series of commands, the psalmist then shifts to an expansive invitation.

In verse 5 he says, *"Come and see what God has done."*

The God who commands our worship is not cold and distant and simply requiring our obedience.

No, the God who speaks in this psalm is also the God who enters the messiness and earthiness of human history, who acts in space and time in such a way that men and women are compelled to say to one another: *"Come and see what God has done."*

That phrase, *"Come and see what God has done,"* should bring to mind for us the songs of Zechariah and Mary in response to their angelic visitations, it should remind us of the announcement of the Shepherds after their worshiped the new born Son of God, it should recall for us the women who, on the first day of the week, raced from the empty tomb to tell the disciples that they had seen the Risen Lord.

This phrase, *“Come and See what God has done,”* should remind us that the faith that we confess is not something that begins or ends with us, but we are those who are caught up in the great story of God’s redemption, a story that stretches back for millennia, indeed to the beginning of time itself.

The story that the psalmist tells here, that which he proclaims, *“Come and see what God has done,”* is the story of the Exodus, but according to the psalmist, this story is not only that has relevance for Israel, rather its meaning is for all people.

Come and see what God has done:

he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man.

He turned the sea into dry land;

they passed through the river on foot.

There did we rejoice in him,

who rules by his might forever,

whose eyes keep watch on the nations —

let not the rebellious exalt themselves.

The exodus event, according to the psalmist, is the good news of God’s deliverance, God’s action in history, God’s setting his people free so that they might rejoice in his love.

And, as such, the exodus story is an invitation to all to hear to enter into the joyful celebration of God’s triumph over evil and death.

This, the psalmist is saying, is what God does. Come and see and believe.

But as verse 7 makes clear, the Exodus event is not only an invitation — it is a warning.

For in the exodus, not only was Israel delivered, but Egypt's power was destroyed.

"I will sing to the Lord," sang the Israelites after they walked through the Red Sea, *"For he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea."*

The Exodus was also God's triumph over those who oppose him — particularly the rebellious nation of Egypt, which hardened itself against God's rule and received its just reward.

And, as such, the declaration, *"Come and see what God has done,"* is as much a warning as it is an exhortation.

In verse 8, the psalmist gives us another exhortation to the nations.

"Bless our God, O peoples;" he says, *"let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept our soul among the living and has not let our feet slip."*

But then, the tone changes. This isn't the Exodus story anymore. No, it's a darker, harder one.

And now, the Psalmist begins to address God directly, for the first time in the psalm. He turns away from us, you might say, and speaks to God alone.

These matters are so personal, so difficult, that he needs to talk directly to God about them.

"For you, O God, have tested us," the Psalmist says. *"You have tried us as silver is tried. You brought us into the net; you laid a crushing burden on our backs;*

*you let men ride over our heads;
we went through fire and through water;
yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance."*

This is the story of the exile. The story of God's judgment on Judah after her centuries of unfaithfulness.

This is the story about how God refused to leave Judah in her weakness and sin and rebellion, but drew near to her to painfully cleanse her affections, to intentionally purify her desires, to discipline her in order to lead her into a new place of abundance.

God is the one, the psalmist proclaims, who did all these things. They didn't happen to his people because of fate or chance or arbitrary forces.

Beloved, this too is part of we are invited to witness when we hear those words, *"Come and see what God has done."*

For God does this work in our lives as well.

He tests us and tries us. He brings us into the net. He leads us through fire and through water. And then, when we are finally brought to the end of ourselves, he brings us into a place of abundance.

Something interesting happens here in verse 13. The voice of the psalmist thus far has been a plural voice, but now in verse 13, the voice shifts to the singular.

Before, the psalmist has said "we" and, "us." But now he says, "I."

*13 I will come into your house with burnt offerings;
I will perform my vows to you,
14 that which my lips uttered
and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.
15 I will offer to you burnt offerings of fattened animals,
with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams;
I will make an offering of bulls and goats.*

Here, the living Christ, the psalmist par excellence, speaks.

Jesus is the ideal worshipper, he is the liturgical representative of the people of God, and here he takes up their story and makes it his own.

But offering Jesus brings, of course, is not the offering of bulls and goats — rather he refers ultimately to what those offerings point forward to — the offering of his own body on the cross, which he presented to the Father as a sacrifice for the sins of the people.

Our Lord Jesus is, as Hebrews proclaims, the sacrificial victim as well as the priest who offers the sacrifice — not again and again, but once for all, so that the story of God's redemption might be offered to all, that all the nations might be brought into the history of the Exodus and the Exile and the return to the place of abundance.

And then, in verse 16, the Living Christ speaks to his church.

This, beloved, is important to see.

The nations are no longer the audience for the psalmist's words here.

No, in verse 16, Jesus says to his brothers and sisters, he says to you and me: *"Come and hear, all you who fear God,
and I will tell what he has done for my soul."*

This is an invitation of the deepest intimacy.

This is our elder brother gathering us around and giving us his own testimony about the faithfulness of the Father.

Jesus, in these words that follow, is inviting us to share in his own incarnate knowledge of his Father's goodness, his Father's faithfulness, his Father's complete and utter trustworthiness that he bears witness to in his own risen body.

I cried to him with my mouth, Jesus says to us, and high praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

This testimony of Jesus is borne from his experience on the cross. He knew that his Father would not deliver him from death itself, but he trusted his Father would not leave him enthralled by death's power.

Indeed, as Jesus gave himself in death to his Father, he prayed the most vulnerable prayer that has ever been offered, saying, *"Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit!"*

And in verses 19-20, Jesus bears witness to us, even today, about how his Father responded to that prayer.

He says:

*But truly God has listened;
he has attended to the voice of my prayer.
Blessed be God,
because he has not rejected my prayer
or removed his steadfast love from me!*

It's fascinating to me that this psalm, which begins with such a broad lens, with a universal call to the nations, which tells of the great corporate stories of Israel's Exodus and Exile, ends on such a personal and intimate note.

It is the voice of the lone worshipper here who speaks. All of Israel's story, all of God's plan for the nations hinges on his response to one man's prayer, one man's desperate cry for help as he relinquished himself into the hands of his Father.

And what Jesus wants to tell us, above all things, about God, is that his Father is the one who hears our prayer.

Beloved, Jesus wants you to know, and he bears witness to this himself, that God sees you in your need, that your Father listens to the cries of your heart, that your Heavenly Father is attuned to your sorrows and trouble.

Truly God has listened; Jesus says, he has attended to the voice of my prayer.

Beloved, this is the hope of the Gospel. The goodness and faithfulness of God is not something that you are responsible for clinging to on your own.

It's not something you just grit your teeth and hold onto and believe.

No, the only way you can truly trust and believe that God hears your prayers, that God listens to your cries is if you are willing to believe in and depend upon the personal testimony that Jesus offers to these things.

Beloved, you must see that your faith hinges not on the strength of your will, but on the veracity of the word of the Living Christ.

The voice of faith is not the still, small voice in the inner chambers of your heart — it is the voice that speaks to you from outside yourself.

Indeed, the voice of faith is the strong voice of the Risen Christ, who says, *“Trust me, friend, in the midst of your trials and darkness and confusion. Trust me, because I know the Father. I know what he is like. And truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer.”*

And it because of the testimony of Jesus, it is because Jesus himself has faith in his Father’s love that we can join with him and say, not on our own strength, but fully dependent on him:

*Blessed be God,
because he has not rejected my prayer
or removed his steadfast love from me!*

This is the hope of the gospel. This is the voice of faith. This, beloved, is the voice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Let us listen to him.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.