

March 24, 2019 Psalm 95:1-7 Rev. Micol Cottrell

“I call it my cathedral of trees,” Barb said to the small group. “Every day when I take my dog out in the morning I make sure to walk through the tall trees by my house. On sunny days when I look up the sun shining through the leaves it reminds me of light coming through stained glass windows. I feel close to God in my cathedral of trees. I say a prayer, stop for a minute or two and just pay attention to God’s presence.”

Barb was in her seventies, a regular participant in Sunday worship and small groups, and was a woman of deep faith which she shared openly. We were talking about holy places at a Drum Circle Worship at my church in New Liskeard. When asked where you experience God’s presence outside Barb shared with us: “There is a small wooded area just outside of my house I call it my cathedral of trees.”

O come, let us sing to God. Let us shout with joy to the rock of our salvation... For you are a great God...in your hands are the depths of the earth...

The psalms are ancient songs of worship. There are psalms that lament what is happening in lives – psalms that cry out to God in sorrow, despair, anger, or fear. There are psalms of praise that celebrate God’s presence and retell the faith stories. Psalms were used for communal worship, in households, and by individuals. Some psalms were connected to important events in the lives of King David and sung every year during the festivals”

The psalm we share today is a psalm of praise. It is a song of entering into worship. It celebrates God and recounts what God has done. Let's gather together and sing praise to God. Let's shout out loud! Let's bow and kneel in worship.

Whenever we join in saying or singing the Psalms we join with the ancestors of our faith in worship. We join with the ancient Hebrew people, the members of the early church, the reformers, and those who have sat in this place and worshiped before us.

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One of the great honours and responsibilities of ministry in our tradition is that each week I get to create a worship service. We are not a prayer book church so this means that each week the call to worship and the prayers all need to be chosen or written. Hymns needed to be chosen. I study and reflect on scripture.

Although there is a lot of flexibility and choices in our worship service there is also a certain flow to our worship, there is movement that we take part in each week: Gathering, Centring, Reflecting, Responding, and Scattering.

Gathering. We enter the time for worship. We carve out time in our lives to gather together. We gather with our own needs and we gather to be here for one another. We gather in silence, in conversation, to music, to handshakes, with shouts of praise and with quiet prayers.

Centring. We mark this time as different by shifting our focus. For me, one of the many reasons why I wear my alb and stole— that's this fancy white

robe and this piece of cloth – is that it helps me shift my focus. As I rush around getting ready every Sunday, greet people, pray with the choir, the couple of minutes when I put on my alb, stole, and cross is my centring time – it shifts my focus into worship, reminding me what I'm here for – to worship and to guide us in worship. We centre ourselves with words, with silence, with candle lighting, with music. We shift our focus and open our lives to Holy presence in the midst of our day to day lives. We shift our focus to being part of a worshipping community.

Reflecting. We spend time thinking about our faith. We listen for God's wisdom spoken to us through scripture. We reflect on our calling as individuals and as church as we listen and reflect on our Minute for Mission and the sermon. We listen for the holy voice that seeps through the imperfection of words and the grasping to try to speak to that which is beyond description. We listen for God's comfort, direction, healing, and transformation. We think about our own lives, the lives of those around us, the world, all creation. We reflect upon all of this from a place of worship where we remember God's presence and the blessing of all life.

Responding. We take time to be inspired by worship and to feel God pulling us from a space of stillness into action. We celebrate the gifts of God that fill our life and we share our gifts. Whether or not we place something in the offering plates or the food cart we respond with our lives, our relationships, and our prayers. When we touch that offering plate, it can be a holy moment to pause for a second and offer a prayer and feel God's invitation to live life in relationship. We respond with our prayers – prayers of thanksgiving, prayers of need, prayers of heartbreak, prayers for

ourselves and prayers for others. Prayer is the holy outpouring of our love and our opening our lives to the love of God and the love of community.

Scattering. I like this word. I didn't come up with these words but scattering is my favourite description for how we end worship. We scatter. We take some time to remember what our leaving is all about and to bless that last movement of our formal worship together. We sing a going out song. We share a commissioning and benediction – that is we hear a blessing upon our lives and a reminder of our call as disciples. We sing or listen to a choral blessing. We leave the sanctuary and this set aside time. Scattering can mean simply moving out in different directions. But the reason I really like this word is that it remind us of the scattering of seeds. Going out into different corners of our communities, we scatter the Good News, like seeds, trusting that through our lives and our relationship God is at work in our world.

Stewardship reminds us that all that we are and all that we have is a gift from God. Our time is a gift from God. The moments, the days, the years we have are all gifts. Worship is responding to God's gift of our time by offering some of it back to God. Faith is relational. To nurture relationship we have to share our time. By taking time to worship regularly we open ourselves to God's presence and God calling us to discipleship.

Of course worship isn't just about Sunday. As Beth's story reminds us offering our time back to God in worship can happen anytime and anywhere.

We can gather and centre. We can set aside time. Maybe it's time during our morning walk, or coffee, or commute - time to gather our self and shift our focus towards God. Time to breathe and be in the moment. Time to let go, or try to let go, of all the stuff that pulls at our attention and our time.

We can reflect. We can reflect on God's word spoken to us through scripture, through devotionals, through nature, through words, images, or silence.

We can respond and scatter. We can feel God pulling us through stillness into action. We can feel that holy pull that reminds us that our lives are gifts from God to be shared, remembering that wherever we find ourselves God is at work planting the good news through our lives.

This week our spiritual practice is this: Let us take some time and carve out some of our time each day to give back to God in worship. It can be formal or informal. It can be time marked within our routines like Barb found in her daily walks with her dog. With love, with care, with joy, let us take a moment each day to respond to God's gift of time through worship.

When we offer our time back to God we remember and strengthen our holiest of relationships, a relationships that heals, transforms, and leads us to be bearers of the Good News in this world. Friends, let us worship often and regularly for we are blessed to be a blessing. Thanks be to God.
Amen.