

Prayer: Ever-present God, wherever we find ourselves, we find you. In times of trouble and confusion, in times of gratitude and joy, you accompany us. Never let us forget that we are held in place by the threads of your love. That in love you are with us. Inspire us to discover and re-discover ways to worship you in spirit and in truth. Amen.

Included in the offerings for our reflections and spiritual nourishment today are the two Bible text we heard, Psalm 145 and the prophet Haggai, and we've been given the given title of 'Praise God'. The Psalm is a wonderful hymn of praise, and Haggai offers thoughtful words about the place of praise. The issue for me is more; how to relate them – to us? What might they be offering for our daily lives, a few thousand years after they were written? What might they say to us about the place the praise of God has in our lives?? cV

Let me tell a story, for we all have stories, and we find our place in life, in family, in history by our story. So stories absolutely necessary – some are true and some are not – this is a parable from PJWharton: Forgetting God Stories and Parables for Preachers and Teachers p 53

"A spider built his web in a barn, high among the rafters, where he started by spinning a long, thin thread attached to the end of one of the beams. With this thread still attached to him, the spider jumped off the beam and spun out more thread on the way down, until he reached the place he planned as the centre of his web.

From the centre, he then spun out other threads like the spokes of a wheel, attaching each end of them to the walls and other places. Finally he had an exquisitely made web that helped him catch many fine, fat flies. But he grew fat, and lazy, and vain.

One day, while admiring the web he had spun, he noticed the long, fine thread he had first spun from the top beam and said, "I wonder what that is for? I can't imagine why I ever put it there; it doesn't catch any flies."

And so on a sudden impulse he broke it. But as a result the whole wonderful web collapsed. The spider had forgotten that the one thread – the link to the strongest beam above – supported the whole web."

In my preparation this week this parable spoke to me and *so I shared it*- because I don't know for you but sometimes, *just sometimes*, I discover that I have become so busy doing what I am supposed to do, that the praise of God gets forgotten. I am making an absolute distinction today – between the usual / expected / normal practice of prayer / mediation ///... and the practice of time to praise God. Cv
And today that link in faith is being highlighted as the support for the rest of *my* life. Not prayer as such, not good works, not suffering or pain or laughter or joy....

But prayer as time in the presence of God **in praise**. My practical brain voice starts to whisper: *what a waste – just think you could have written the sermon – visited a thousand people, chaired a couple of meetings, read those reports, written up minutes...* **How** do you 'justify' practicing the discipline of time to praise God? cV

Silly isn't it, because as God's Holy people **that is exactly** what keeps us 'attached', anchored, held in place – so that we **can do** what we want, believe, are called and challenged to do. It isn't *necessarily* a lot that we have to do – but to do something, and developing the habit is really good.

I asked and received permission to share this. It was a couple of weeks ago that Stephen set himself the challenge to find one thing he was thankful for a day and post it on facebook, for the next 100 days. It's not hard to guess that a prayer for him would be, that having learnt the benefits of doing this – he will maintain the practice in one form or another. As he gives thanks – there is a process happening 'within',

that includes an acceptance of a world and the life around, and this shifts his focus from a self-reflection place to acknowledging a bigger, wider, place where he can give thanks to God for all around him. cV

I believe we can trace this pattern within our psalm today. It is attributed to King David, and begins with personal reflections about meditating on the works of YHWH-God, about celebrating and telling everyone about YHWH-God's unsearchable greatness, abundant goodness and righteousness. (Wallace) Let's read together the first 5 verses:

"1 I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. **2** Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. **3** Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. **4** One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. **5** They will speak of the glorious splendour of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works."

But this psalm is more than an individual's personal faith reflection; it has a much grander scope of vision. For instance as we read through it the '**I**' becomes 'all'. Vs 20 **20** The LORD watches over all who love him, ..." HC Wallace teaches that the word 'all' is found 17 times highlighting the comprehensive nature of giving praise to God, "every creature will praise..." (vs21) Giving thanks and praise to God is what we were designed to do! There no need to justify it – just do it! cV

Then why is doing it so hard? In our humanity we forget. Stephen *had to admit* when I asked him that he had slipped his pattern for a few days and it's not that I am picking on him, he didn't say it would be a continuous 100 days...and well- his story is so much ours – right? It is exactly what we do – we remember the good – old days, we remember how it was when we did – we know better... cv

The words we had this morning from prophet Haggai are full of comfort for his people, but not quite totally – he does hide them for wanting **memories that can't** happen again. And a few words before we began he was telling them that their hope to provide a place for worship of God was not happening **because** they had put building their own homes first... Self-centredness not God centred-ness called for confession and repentance from the people... But Haggai doesn't stop with the call for confession; there is not much room for it in this second shortest book in our Bible! He moves into giving the words of comfort and hope.

We forget – but God does not. Yes, we will have the earth shake and rattle around us – but God is with us. God will enable them to build a place to offer praise and worship within. This new temple will be filled with the glory of the Lord. So Haggai tells the people's leaders: Zerubbabel, their prince and Joshua the priest to get on with it because '**God is with you**'. (Wallace) Wallace says that Haggai's people were "dispirited because the present effort lacked in comparison to the glories of the former temple."

What Haggai does for his people is lead them into an awareness that although the Temple is important as the Place where God can be found, and worshiped, their own God-story has taught them that it is far more significant to discover God-with-you, where-ever –you-are. Whether that is in exile; wandering for 40 years in the wilderness; trying to rebuild a shattered temple; or living amid the 'shakes of life'.

The physical place of worship (the temple) is important **because** it is where **praise of the ever present** God is offered, where peace is found. But Haggai's words for us today emphasise that the place is not so important as **what happens within**. And the happening within can actually happen anywhere- anytime – **should** happen anywhere, anytime because the praise and worship of God is *what keeps us connected* – with our-self, with ourselves, with our community, our world and with our God.

And for most of us in our humanity, we need the physical place of worship and **praise** to remind us to keep the connection, because like the spider in my parable – cut off, we are lost and as Jesus said – we can do nothing, but in remaining in him – we can do more than he did. Praise God. Amen.