



still waters

home church studies

Psalm 112

[Worship]

1 Praise the LORD! Happy are those who fear the LORD, who greatly delight in his commandments. 2 Their descendants will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. 3 Wealth and riches are in their houses, and their righteousness endures forever. 4 They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright; they are gracious, merciful, and righteous. 5 It is well with those who deal generously and lend, who conduct their affairs with justice. 6 For the righteous will never be moved; they will be remembered forever. 7 They are not afraid of evil tidings; their hearts are firm, secure in the LORD. 8 Their hearts are steady, they will not be afraid; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes. 9 They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor; their righteousness endures forever; their horn is exalted in honor. 10 The wicked see it and are angry; they gnash their teeth and melt away; the desire of the wicked comes to nothing.

Consider:

[Words]

Paul's meditation on the crucified Christ leads him to see that his death discloses "what is truly human," a humanity that contradicts the conventional way of the world (verse 11). Such human persons—grafted into the self-giving death of Christ—live differently in the world, according to "the Spirit that is given by God" with "gifts bestowed on us by God" (verse 12).

The other readings illuminate what that new humanity looks like and whom we are called in Christ to be. Psalm 112 outlines the conduct of a "righteous person" who is "happy" in a life of Torah obedience. Such persons are "gracious and merciful" (verse 4), "generous" in "justice," (verse 5), "not afraid" in the world (verse 8), and ready to give to the poor (verse 9). Such persons live a life given over to the well-being of community.

A specific dimension of such humanity is voiced in Isaiah 58. The chapter poses the question of "Who belongs?" This prophetic poem tilts completely toward inclusion of those most unlike "us." The new human person practices a large, embracing, notion of the neighborhood.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus designates his community of followers as "salt" (Matthew 5:13) and as "light" (verse 14), the ones who obey the Torah command to love God and to love neighbor. The "righteousness that exceeds" (verse 20) is not about punctilious moralism or self-enhancement through "goodness." Rather, it concerns a reach beyond the self to the neighborhood and the world.

Thus the righteousness of the psalm, the inclusiveness of the prophetic poem, and the new righteousness of Jesus add up to the "mind of Christ" in 1 Corinthians 2:16, the capacity to act and to give, even as Jesus gave himself for the world. Such a human person unmistakably lives against the stream in our society. Clearly the Jesus community is peopled by folk with energy and courage to live beyond "business as usual."

– Walter Bruggemann

[Scripture]

Matthew 5.13-20

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. 17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Reread

Isaiah 58.1-12 & 1 Corinthians 2.1-16