



still waters

home church studies

Psalm 32

[Worship]

1 Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. 2 Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. 3 While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah*

5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the guilt of my sin. *Selah*

6 Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them. 7 You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. *Selah*

8 I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. 9 Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you. 10 Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD. 11 Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

Consider:

[Words]

Psalm 32 offers one of the most acute analyses of the power and cost of sin—and the way out of the torment of sin. It knows that we are “happy” when forgiven and restored to relationship with God (verses 1-2), that we are immobilized when out of sync with God (verses 3-4), and that the route from being burdened to being happy is by truth-telling (verse 5). The deep either/or is

the reality of the “torments” of alienation or the “steadfast love” of reconciliation (verse 10). These ancients understood the deep processes of alienation and reconciliation before they came to be expressed in modern, scientific categories.

The Genesis reading about the “garden of desire,” and the complementary epistle reading in Romans, concern the deep, insatiable human propensity to live out of sync with God through an uncontrolled (uncontrollable?) desire. Human persons are propelled in ways that we do not understand to live in willful self-assertion or in willful abdication—either way refusing the covenantal, dialogical invitation to be God’s partner in the life of the world. As the Genesis reading gives dramatic force to that compulsion, so the reading from Romans 5 counters the power of false desire with the power of Christ, who is God’s decisive resolution of such alienation. Matthew 4 exhibits Jesus as the one who has the capacity to resist such tempting desire and so to defeat the elemental force of false desire that so occupies and commands the world. The route from alienation to reconciliation is a path that we travel over and over. Thus we may believe that Psalm 32 is—in ways both didactic and liturgical—a reiterated process whereby its practitioners move from false desire to a shared life with and before God. – Walter Bruggemann

[Scripture]

Matthew 4.1-11

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 3 The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4 But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" 5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" 7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; 9 and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10 Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" 11 Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.
