

General Presbyter Report  
January 29, 2011

Psalm 63:1-4 (TEV) a psalm of longing

O God, you are my God, and I long for you.

My whole being desires you;

Like a dry, worn-out, and waterless land,

My soul is thirsty for you.

Let me see you in the sanctuary;

Let me see how mighty and glorious you are.

Your constant love is better than life itself,

And so I will praise you.

I will give you thanks as long as I live;

I will raise my hands to you in prayer.

If you are like me, right about now, at the end of January, it feels as though it has already been a long, cold winter... and though the days are beginning to lengthen as we slowly move toward spring, warm weather, Easter, and new life seem an awfully long way off.

The tragedy in Tucson, the economic woes of Greece, Ireland, and now Spain... The unrest in the Middle East, Africa and across Europe, the drug wars in Mexico and Columbia...., the violence in Tunisia and now Egypt, the ongoing unemployment here at home, the 3 million new foreclosures that are predicted in the USA in 2011....

Even when spring comes, it's going to continue to be a long, cold winter for too many people around the world and right here at home.

It is so easy to feel stretched thin, parched... like a dry, worn-out, and waterless land... our hearts, minds, and spirits are thirsty for signs of God's presence. As a faith community we hardly know how to respond to the needs of our own neighbors, let alone to the needs of people in other places around the globe.

Let us see how mighty and glorious you are, God!

Let us see you in the sanctuary, and in the streets!

O God, you are our God, and we long for you!

I confess, I've been struggling lately, and had no idea what to say in my report to you this morning. A friend of mine reminded me that when we don't know what to say or do next, we turn to the scriptures. It's God's good news....

Many preachers around the world are lifting up the beatitudes on Sunday... so this friend offered me some reflections on the Sermon on the Mount which almost instantly served to anchor and encourage me.... so I offer them to you as well, as bread for this journey we are on.

Kurt Vonnegut:

For some reason, the most vocal Christians among us never mention the Beatitudes. But, often with tears in their eyes, they demand that the 10 commandments be posted in public buildings. And of course that's Moses, not Jesus. I haven't heard one of them demand that the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, be posted anywhere. "Blessed are the merciful? In a courtroom? "Blessed are the peacemakers" in the Pentagon? Give me a break!

But...regardless of the values of our culture.... No matter what is happening in the world at any given moment, Jesus still calls us to a radical hope, a radical way of life.

Blessed are the poor in spirit...

- Those who detach themselves from possessions
- Those who are aware of their own helplessness and deep sense of spiritual poverty
- Those who put their complete trust in God

Blessed are those who mourn...

- Those who endure deep sorrow
- Those who are deeply sorry for their sin
- Those who care compassionately for the needs and sufferings of others

Blessed are the meek...

- Those who have the humility to admit their own weakness and ignorance
- Those who are selflessly indignant at moral injustice
- Those whose attitudes and actions are under God's control

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...

- Those who long to be filled completely with God's goodness
- Those who trust God alone to meet their material and spiritual needs
- Those who fast and pray for the coming of the kingdom

Blessed are the merciful...

- Those who are always ready to be kind and forgiving
- Those who willingly set aside their own concerns to relieve the pain of others
- Those who speak gracious words of hope in the midst of seemingly hopeless situations

Blessed are the pure in heart...

- Those who take time to examine themselves in the light of God's word
- Those who have honest motives and rightly ordered thoughts
- Those who are seeking single mindedly to know and do God's will

Blessed are the peacemakers...

- Those who work actively to reconcile people and groups at odds with each other
- Those who seek to calm their own chaos, creating inner peace
- Those who learn to love their enemies, bringing them God's peace

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake...

- Those who are loyal to God at the risk of their lives
- Those who endure insult and ridicule as they practice Christian love
- Those who struggle and suffer so that others may know the truth of the gospel