

Sunday February 16, 2020
Lesson 12: Holy People
Scripture: Psalm 24: 1-6

Context:

Our lesson moves from the holiness accounts of God in Exodus and goes to the Psalms. The focus of this lesson is on people who are made holy by God. This short psalm describes how the holiness of God plays a role with how humans can become holy.

The first part of the psalm establishes the subject of the psalm as God. The kingship of the Lord is the focus and all the parts of the psalm lead back to addressing the Lord's sovereign rule.¹ The first two verses establish the Lord as the owner of all things, including the earth.

This focus on creation asserts the power of the Lord as well as the ownership that comes with the Lord. The world exists because the Lord is and remains sovereign.² When we see the world and all the things that comprise it, there is the evidence of the reign of the Lord.³ From the humans to the murky waters of oceans and rivers, all belong to God and showcase the glory and majesty of the Lord. No one has a monopoly on the Lord and the verses set God opposite any other forces that may claim power over the land or other people.

The second part of the psalm moves to those humans in relationship with God. The people referenced in the psalm are those who are part of the congregation seeking to make a confession about God and desire the presence of the owner of the world.⁴ As they move to come near to God, they must go to the hill of the Lord. The hill of the Lord is Mount Zion, which houses the temple.⁵ As the people ascend the hill, they are coming closer to God who sits in the temple set apart from the world.

Because of the holy nature of the temple, there is the question of who may come before God. The adjectives "clean" and "pure" are ethical terms, not ritual purification vocabulary.⁶ Those who are clean are those who are faithful to God and neighbor. As they come to worship God, they come to receive a blessing and righteousness so they might be renewed in their relationship with God. Those who respond by seeking to live in

¹ Mays, James L. "Psalms," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (John Knox Press: Louisville, KY, 1994), 119.

² Ibid., 120.

³ Ibid., 120.

⁴ Ibid., 120.

⁵ Ibid., 121.

⁶ Ibid., 121.

peace and righteousness with neighbor and God will receive renewal from God.⁷ There is a transformation that is to occur, making the people holy.

Application:

The word “holiness” is not one that we hear often today. However, it is a central tenet to the formation of the United Methodist Church. Wesley and the early Methodists believed in holiness as a central tenet of the Christian faith.

Holiness has always been a part of the Christian faith. It is not about following ritual purity laws or about achieving our salvation. Instead, holiness is a response to God as the Spirit moves through us to radiate a new and powerful way of being. Holiness is a way of life in which we seek to draw closer to God.

Holy people are those who desire to grow close to God and not because it will mean more jewels in their crown. Holy people genuinely seek to love God with their whole being and find the ways they are called to love their neighbor. They understand they are sinful and in deep need of the grace and mercy of our Lord. They do not lie and they do not go after false things. They seek God’s blessing not for their own validation, but more to fully surrender to God.

Hopefully, we can understand that being holy is a lifelong process. There is not one place where we get to and suddenly we know everything about what it means to be God’s holy people. As I grow older, I discover even the wisest stages I know are still seeking ways to grow in holiness before God.

What might be helpful would be to consider who do you think of as holy and what puts them in that category for you. Easy answers might be like the saints such as Mother Teresa or former crusader like Billy Graham. Other answers might be of the people you know from your childhood like the beloved confirmation mentor who walked you through the faith or a grandparent who taught you about the spiritual disciplines and what it meant to bear fruit in daily life.

Hopefully, even if you have to dwell on it for a bit, you can think about modern day people who radiate holiness for you. Maybe it is the social worker you see who cares deeply about justice for children and doing what is right for families. Maybe you know of someone who is involved in prison ministry and seeks to care for those who have been incarcerated. Or perhaps you know of someone in your Sunday school class or life group, who not only knows about the Bible, but puts it to practice with deeds of mercy and kindness and acts of love for those in the group.

Those individuals are all different from you perhaps. Yet you can learn from them of how being a holy person means radiating the gifts God has given you. Holiness is something that is on going.

I will never forget when one of my classmates at Vanderbilt University Divinity School asked Bishop Pennel if he would have done anything different in his ministry over the years. He paused and then said he wished he had spent more time ordering the life of his churches to receive Holy Community more often, forming groups to gather to study the scriptures, offering opportunities to teach people how to pray, and encouraging people to do deeds of mercy and kindness. All of these are centered on the understanding of holiness is central to the tenets of the Christian faith. His words are ones I have

⁷ Ibid. 122.

remembered in my own ministry as we wonder about the steps and directions we are to take as a church.

What does holiness mean to you? How is holiness different than ritual purity? Why do you think holiness was so important to the early Methodist movement? Who are the people you consider to be examples of holiness? How can you strive for holiness in your daily life considering the words of Bishop Pannel?

Rev. E. Hunter Pugh
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge
PO Box 71
Brantley, AL 36009