

Worship And Power

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] Because of the peculiarities of the calendar, Ash Wednesday is this Wednesday and Easter Sunday is before the 1st of April.

And so you'll find in your bulletin this morning a leaflet on the sort of Bible study guide on the epistle of Paul to Titus. And that is going to be the subject of the sermons throughout Lent beginning next Sunday when Dr. Peter Mason, who is the principal of Wycliffe College in Toronto, will be here to preach.

And he's going to introduce us to Titus. Two weeks from today we have the Parksville weekend. And a lot of people come and ask me, well, what's going to happen at the Parksville weekend that is going to make it worthwhile my coming?

Well, the answer to that question is that your presence is really what's going to make it worthwhile for everybody else. So make sure you're there, will you please, because everybody else is depending on you.

And I'd like you, if you haven't registered, to do so today. It really is an important weekend in the life of our parish. And people who come to church Sunday by Sunday finally find that at a parish weekend they get to know people that months go by and they never get to know.

[1 : 22] We had a vestry meeting on Tuesday night of last week, which was well attended. And there was a super abundance of pie. You'll be glad to know. But there was a major motion on the restoration of this building and the renovation of the church hall.

And we're going to go ahead and investigate that further and see what can be done about it. And that's an important step in the life of the parish. Ed Norman is on leave as of this Sunday.

And so I want you to look at this period as a kind of experimental period when we experiment with what we can do musically as a parish. Don't feel too badly. I know some people find that they can't worship unless the choir's here or they can't worship fully unless they're here to lead us.

Well, fortunately, this Sunday is all about worship. So I want to turn the responsibility over to you a little bit to lead the worship in this congregation.

I talked to a lady who with prophetic vision said to me this week, and I really appreciated it, even though it's smarted slightly. She said, some things happen to the worship of St. John.

[2 : 38] It's become all loose and jolly, more like entertainment than worship. Well, that was said in love, I'm sure. And the trouble is that it comes too close to the truth to being easy to hear.

But let's all hear it this morning. When I took that little text this morning at 8 o'clock and presented it to the congregation, I was warned by another prophetic lady that reverence starts at the front of the church, not at the back.

So I'm still contending that it starts at the back. As I preach this, I'm not unmindful that you mightn't agree totally.

Lovely lessons for the beginning of Lent when you have Isaiah saying, as he sees the glory of the Lord and he says, I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

You know, the sense of being totally overwhelmed by the glory of God. It's very different from being overwhelmed by our own importance. Then in the epistle, Paul says, I am the least of the apostles, not worthy to be called an apostle.

[4 : 01] And Peter, when he draws up the great catch of fish, says, depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man. A tremendous sense of unworthiness belonging to Isaiah, to Paul, and to Peter.

And I suggest it wouldn't be inappropriate as we begin Lent, if it belonged to each one of us, too, as we try and catch again the vision of God's glory.

In Psalm 138, which is the subject on which I want to speak this morning, and which you will find in your prayer books, as you have already done following the lesson, you'll find it on page 552.

And I would like to talk about it. I was very sort of struck again when the New Testament lesson was read, when Peter turned to the Lord and said, when he was told to let down his nets for a draft, and he said, we've labored all night and taken nothing.

Long, significant pause. Nevertheless, I will do as you say. Well, I confess to you that when, in the course of this week past, I turned to Psalm 138, you know, I looked at it and said, I could labor all week with that psalm and catch nothing.

[5 : 44] There isn't anything there which people haven't heard a thousand times before. What's the use? And then the joy, well, I guess the grace that God gives to say, nevertheless, and here it is, 10 o'clock on Sunday morning, and I feel that there is so much in that psalm, that if we kept going from now till the middle of next week, we wouldn't begin to exhaust the great good that there is for our hearts and souls in that psalm.

I mean, it's a lovely, lovely thing. First of all, it tells you this, and I think you should remember this, that the psalmist, who is King David and who writes it, is doing that thing which makes him most completely a human being.

The highest function of a human being is to offer worship to God. And that's why an hour is set apart on the first day of the week, week after week, so that the first thing we do as a congregation and as Christians, the first thing we do in the week is together to worship God, because that's who we really are.

That's where we define who we are, and the rest of the week is working it out, so that you have this sort of magnificent statement.

Now, I've divided it into three paragraphs. I haven't divided it. The book has divided it into them, and you will see them in verses one to three, verses four to six, and verses seven and eight.

[7 : 36] And if you want an easy way of putting these verses together in a sequence, you will find that the theme of the first verse, I suggest, comes from the Lord's Prayer, where it says, Hallowed be thy name.

That's verses one to three. Verses four to six, thy kingdom come. And verses seven and eight, thy will be done.

So, David offers his praise, and what a wonderful opportunity it gives us, because he's given us these words to stand where he stood before God, and to make these our words, as on this glorious morning, in this wonderful part of the earth, and in possession of most of our faculties in a measure of health, we can say, I give thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart.

God grant that that may be a statement, which all of us can make, in the course of this service this morning. to give thanks with our whole heart. That's where we begin.

Before the gods, I sing thy praise. And we are almost crowded off the map by the gods of this generation, and the gods of our world, by the ideologies and philosophies of men.

[9 : 12] But before them all, with a boldness that comes from God, before them all, we sing the praise of the God and Father of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Not only that, but in verse 2, we establish the direction of our lives. You know how there is grid north, and there is magnetic north, and then there is true north, immortalized in the national anthem of this country?

Well, the true sort of bearing of our lives is towards the place of worshiping God. I bow down toward thy temple.

And so at the beginning of the week, we establish what direction we're going to live in. We're going to live before God, and we're going to make him great, and we're going to bow down before him.

We're going to share Isaiah's, I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. And we're going to bow low before him.

[10 : 19] Or Peter's, depart from me, for I am a sinful man. Or Paul's, I am the least of the apostles, not worthy to be called an apostle. We bow down and worship of the glory of God.

Because God has done this. You see, he has exalted above everything his name, that is who he really is, and his word.

And he doesn't exalt his word because of its intrinsic merit. He exalts his word because what he has promised, he performs.

It is accomplished. And so you see, this is what it means to hallow the name of God, to make great, or to magnify the name of God.

The thing that is really big in my life is the fact of God and his steadfast love, the revelation of his character, his name, the dependability of his word.

[11 : 20] This becomes great, and my soul magnifies the Lord. That becomes big out of all proportion to anything else in my life. God, a hallowed be his name.

Magnify him. And then the lovely third verse, which says, On the day I called, thou didst answer me. My strength of soul, thou didst increase.

And that means we call on God because of this situation or that situation, and God answers us. But it tells us he answers.

In this instance, it tells us that he answers in a particular way. You may say, Lord, this is the problem and it's bigger than I am. And the Lord says, I'm not going to change the problem, but I'm going to make you bigger than it is.

And that's what he does in verse three, do you see? My strength of soul, thou didst increase. As we magnify the Lord, we become, by God's grace, bigger than our problems, bigger than the things that beset us, bigger than the troubles that surround us.

[12 : 36] That's how God answers that prayer. It's a tremendous picture. Well, that is, hallowed be thy name, magnifying God in our midst and hallowing his name.

The second thing is, thy kingdom come. You know, it says that the kingdom will come because all the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O Lord.

That, you know when we sing that high king of heaven from, I think it's from And Can It Be? No, it isn't. It's from one of those, it's from that Irish hymn we sing all the time, where there were lots of little kings around, but then there was a high king.

And from that picture, the king which is above every king. And what the message is, is, to all the kings of the earth, where Jesus is not Lord, you are not king.

And when you are fully king, it will be because you have come to praise the Lord. In verse 4, you have heard the words of his mouth, and you have seen and sing of his ways.

[13 : 52] For great is the glory of the Lord. Like Isaiah's vision of the great glory of the Lord. The glory of the Lord is supremely revealed as God opens his heart to us and reveals himself in the cross of Jesus Christ.

And we sing, in the cross of Christ, I glory, because the glory of my God is revealed to me in that. Many people see the cross without seeing the glory.

It's a wonderful grace when we see the great glory of God revealed. And we see that his kingdom comes essentially because it must come.

There is no other possibility. There is no other way in which all the kings of the earth, all the tribes, and all the nations, and all the cultures, and all the languages will come to see the great glory of the Lord our God.

And in verse 6, the sort of practical conclusion of this section, the Lord is high and regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar.

[15 : 08] The king who is haughty, that is, self-important, God runs in parallel lines with him. He sees him, but he doesn't deal with him.

But for the lowly, God intersects with him. That's what happens, that God meets us in our lowliness.

So that is the kingdom come, the sense of the whole earth coming to acknowledge God as Lord, the high king of heaven, the great God above all gods, a great king above all gods, as we say so often in our worship.

And then the third section is, thy will be done. A very important sequence I want to point out to you here. If you want to start praying, start by giving thanks to God.

That's verses 1, 2, and 3. Giving thanks and praising God and bowing towards his temple and remembering his steadfast love and faithfulness, knowing that he has exalted above everything, his name and his word, and knowing that he can make you bigger than all your problems.

[16 : 30] That's the first thing you do. And then you look at the world in which you live, and you recognize that the kingdom comes when we acknowledge Jesus Christ to be Lord of lords and king of kings.

And we have heard the words of his mouth. We sing the praise of his ways and we see his glory in the cross. That comes next. And then in the third section, thy will be done, we come to our troubles.

You know, I think, I mean, I feel a certain amount of pressure from my own life and from the lives of people I meet through the week that where we would all like to start every Sunday morning is with my troubles, the midst of the troubles in which I live.

But that's not where we start. We start with praise and thanksgiving, recognizing the power and glory of God, and then, in verse 7, I walk in the midst of trouble.

And now you can take just a moment to recall the troubles in the midst of which you are presently walking. And as you contemplate those troubles, this was David's experience.

[17 : 52] In the midst of them, he says, Thou, Lord, dost preserve my life. Thou dost stretch out thy hand against the wrath of my enemies.

Thy right hand delivers me. As we pray, deliver us from evil. God, in fact, delivers him. And the Lord will fulfill his purpose for me.

That's why it's important that we find his purpose for our lives. We don't do it. It's his purpose. That's the reason for our life.

You'll spend all your days and more trying to find the purpose of your existence apart from him because it's his work in you that fulfills his purpose in you.

So your purpose is to allow him to do that gracious work which he wants to do in you. Do you remember the sound of Isaiah this morning? Ears that can't hear and eyes that can't see.

[18 : 55] And when is God going to change that so that we recognize his purpose and we recognize his steadfast love. So the psalm ends with verse 8.

The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me. Do not forsake the work of thy hands. And Derek Kidner in his commentary points out that the authorized version translation of that which makes one long for the authorized version on occasions is the Lord will perfect that which concerns me.

Though I walk in the midst of trouble the Lord will perfect that which concerns me. He will not forsake the work of his hands.

Do you remember where it says in Psalm 119 Lord thou hast fashioned me and made me that we are his work and that he is he who has begun a good work in us will continue it until the day of Jesus Christ.

The whole of our prayers in the midst of joy in the midst of prosperity in the midst of sorrow and trial is simply thy will be done and that will be our glory and that will be our joy and that will be our fulfillment.

[20 : 27] So as we prepare for our parish communion this morning may we come to it with the words hallowed be thy name and all that verses 1 to 3 say to fulfill out the meaning and content of those words.

And thy kingdom come as indeed David sees it will come in verses 4, 5 and 6. and from the midst of our troubles we cry thy will be done and we know that the Lord will perfect to bring to maturity and to the fulfillment of his purpose the things which concern me.

God grant that that may be our heart's worship as we take part in this service of praise and thanksgiving. Amen.

Amen.