

**Homily, St. Andrew's
Proper 16B, July 19, 2015
Psalm 89**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever more acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

How are you enjoying the summer so far? The extreme heat has left us for now and with both rain and sun this week, the world is beautifully green with God's promise of life abundant fulfilled once more. Summer and winter have always been my preferred seasons over spring and fall. This comes as a surprise to many as I often hear how much people love the fall in particular with the turning of colours and the excitement of a "new year" following the quieter summer season. Many people likewise love the spring and its promise of budding new life. There are good arguments to be made, and to each their own, but for me, I prefer the more settled and stable seasons of winter and summer. Spring and fall are times of change, of transformation. This is good, of course and often something I look forward to. The movement of change that is the essence of both fall and spring is necessary for life... but still, I tend to cherish the greater predictability and reliability of summer and winter.

The repeated, circular flow of the seasons - noticing the differences inherent in different seasons - can be helpful in developing a spirituality for all the seasons of our life. In a theological commentary on the psalms, Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann suggests a simple 3-part scheme as a broad way of classifying and understanding the psalms as part of our spiritual life. Perhaps because of its simplicity, I've often found myself going back to it. Brueggemann's 3 broad themes are: orientation, dis-orientation and new orientation. Within each theme, he includes various sub-themes but the broad overall pattern is of a movement from seasons of stability and well-being, of orientation... to times of trouble, doubt and lament when the old confidence breaks down we become dis-oriented... and finally on to times of expected joy as a new orientation breaks through the distress to transform us and our life into what today we might call, a "new normal." And then the cycle begins again as the newness fades and confidence and trust and security grows.

The phase of orientation, that spirit of confidence and security is reflected particularly well in our assigned psalm for today. The psalms are chosen in the lectionary to reflect something of the Old Testament reading - a story or theme - and that connection is particularly clear today as Psalm 89 tells again of God's covenant with David. Along with 2 Samuel 7, in the first 36 verses of Psalm 89, we hear complete confidence in God's faithfulness to David and the everlasting nature of David's kingdom. It expresses a typical sense of well-being in a season of orientation. As its best, this place of confident, settled faith, a time without doubt, "evokes gratitude for the constancy of blessing" along with articulating a kind of "sacred canopy," a Godly covering or protection, in and for the community, so that life and faith can be lived free from anxiety. (19, 26)

In this case, the sacred canopy is found God's unilateral promise to David: "I have found David my servant and with my holy oil I have anointed him." God has freely chosen David and the future of David's dynasty is built on God's promise: "My faithfulness and my mercy shall be

with him..." Flowing from the strength of God's commitment, we also hear God speak of the special, intimate relationship that develops between them: "He shall call me, 'Thou art my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.' My mercy will I keep for him for evermore; and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure forever, and his throne as the days of heaven." The future of this relationship is guaranteed by God's solemn, irrevocable, oath, as God says: "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie unto David; His seed shall endure forever, and his throne is like as the sun before me. I shall stand fast for evermore as the moon, and as the faithful witness in the sky." Notice the reference to elements of creation as the 'witnesses' of God's oath. It was a common way of securing a kind of legal contract between God and God's chosen people. Here its meaning goes even further, for, particularly when combined with the first 19 verses of the psalm, it makes the relationship between God and David and David's offspring as solid and lasting as creation itself. Hard times may come, difficulties may arise, but like summer, the rain and wind won't last for very long and we can rest assured that the sun will come out again and all will be well with the world.

We know that this season of orientation, of well-being and security, will not last forever. If you continue through to the end of Psalm 89, the spirit and message changes considerably... foreshadowed in our last verse today: "But thou hast abhorred and forsaken thine anointed, and art displeased at him." It is really the beginning of the next, and last, section of the psalm, when the well-being of orientation dramatically breaks down and dis-orientation takes over. The poem shifts dramatically from the psalmist's opening prayer of thanksgiving: "I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, for ever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations;" to God's confident and sure promise: "my steadfast love will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail;" to the psalmist's cry of distress in verse 45: "How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself for ever? How long will your wrath burn like fire?" and finally, "Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?" The psalm ends where it began - with the faithfulness and steadfast love of God - only a movement has taken place from thanksgiving to questioning, from certainty to confusion, from orientation to disorientation.

Because we know how the story develops in the decades and centuries to come, we know that while the sacred canopy of God's promise cracks and tumbles down for a time, all shall be well in the end. Even though the wheels will fall off eventually, a mature relationship with God means, as St. Julian of Norwich once famously said: "All shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well." The good news for us today is that the wheels have not fallen off, the sun and the light and the warmth has returned, and we can enjoy the peaceful contentment of God's promise fulfilled. We know that the sun and rain will give way to snow and cold eventually, the light will fade and change will come once more. But for now, for today, we can rest in our confident orientation of gratitude towards God because of God's orientation of faithfulness towards us. Tomorrow will bring what tomorrow will bring but for today, we can simply enjoy the well-being of today.

May you live in gratitude this week for all that God has given, for all God's promises fulfilled and for all God's blessings received. May you recognize God's steadfast love through every season of your life and that of this community, and give thanks that all is well.