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November 30th: Psalm 78:1-18 & John 1:35-42

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Recounting God's deeds of deliverance. The calling of Andrew and Peter.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Psalm 78 verses 1-18. A Mascal of Asaph. Give ear, O my people, to my teaching.

Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable. I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us.

We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord and His might, and the wonders that He has done. He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments, and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful. The Ephraimites, armed

with the bow, turned back on the day of battle.

They did not keep God's covenant, but refused to walk according to His law. They forgot His works, and the wonders that He had shown them. In the sight of their fathers He performed wonders, in the land of Egypt, in the fields of Zoan.

He divided the sea and let them pass through it, and made the waters stand like a heap. In the daytime He led them with a cloud, and all the night with a fiery light. He split rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep.

He made streams come out of the rock, and caused waters to flow down like rivers. Yet they sinned still more against Him, rebelling against the Most High in the desert. They tested God in their heart, by demanding the food they craved.

Perhaps not that long afterwards, the rebuke of Ephraim, representing the northern tribes, suggests to some that it might have been after the split of the kingdom, but it might be referring to an earlier event. Conrad Schaeffer suggests that it might be connected with the preceding psalm by shared vocabulary, with references to God's might, His power, His right hand, and to God as the Most High, along with the shared themes of the Exodus and forgetting and remembering. Like Psalm 78, Psalm 77 recounts the Red Sea crossing as an event of special importance.

The retelling of history in this psalm is designed to instruct the people in how better to move forward. In the book of Deuteronomy, the necessity of remembering the great deeds of the Lord and His judgments in the wilderness is underlined at several points. To live long in the land, the children of Israel need to draw lessons from experience.

They need to remember and to teach their children. Schaeffer remarks upon literary details of Psalm 78 that heighten the hearer's attention to these themes here. He writes, Continuity is underscored by the repetitions.

Ancestors in verses 3, 5 and 8. Children in verses 4 and 6. Generations in verses 4, 6 and 8. Tell in verses 3, 4 and 6. Know or teach in verses 3, 5 and 6. Beth Tanner cites Richard Clippard's division of the psalm. A division that helps us better to understand its greater purpose. So it begins with a three part introduction in verses 1 to 11.

And then there are two recitals. The first recital is of wilderness events in verses 12 to 39. It begins with God's acts in verses 12 to 16.

Goes on to rebellion in verses 17 to 20. To God's response in verses 21 to 31. And then God's grace in 32 to 39.

The second recital is from verses 40 to 72. And that concerns Egypt and Jerusalem. Again it begins with God's acts in verses 40 to 55.

Moving again to rebellion in verses 56 to 58. To God's response in verses 59 to 64. And then concluding on the theme of God's grace in verses 65 to 72.

The psalm is introduced as a wisdom psalm in what Alan Ross terms a didactic poem. The psalmist presents his psalm as a parable and a dark saying. Within it he will invite his hearers to reflect upon the meaning of their history.

The introduction is similar to that of Psalm 49 verses 1 to 4. Hear this all people, give ear all inhabitants of the world, both low and high, rich and poor together. My mouth shall speak wisdom, the meditation of my heart shall be understanding. I will incline my ear to a proverb, I will solve my riddle to the music of the lyre.

The parable is, as Ross puts it, a teaching based on analogy, whereas the riddle is a disclosing of the ways of God. These are things that they have heard before from their parents, truths that were entrusted to them, and they must now pass them on to their own children. The purpose of the giving of the law was that the people would give them on to the next generation, giving on what they had received from the Lord, so that a faithful tradition would ensure that the memory of God's great deeds of salvation and his revelation of his will would not be forgotten.

The passing on of this tradition would direct the children towards the Lord and protect them from repeating the errors of their parents. Such a tradition makes possible learning over the course of generations. The task of memory and teaching children was always central to the life of Israel.

In Genesis 18, verse 19, the Lord declared his purpose in first choosing Abraham. For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord, by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him. Throughout the book of Deuteronomy, there are frequent exhortations not to forget the great deeds of the Lord in the wilderness, to teach the lessons of the Exodus and the wilderness to their children after them, and to ensure that, in the prosperity of the land, they do not forget.

The charges to teach the next generation and not to forget were especially pronounced concerning the law. In Deuteronomy 6, verses 6-12 for instance, The Lord will bring you to the outposts of your house and on your gates. And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you, with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant, and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

The Lord was never supposed to be far from Israel's lips. They were supposed to meditate on it, to speak concerning it in all settings, and to teach their children after

them in it. Teaching children would serve the preventative purpose of protecting them from repeating the errors of their ancestors.

The Ephraimites are the leading tribe of Joseph's house and the tribe representing the northern tribes, as Judah represents the southern tribes. The event in which the Ephraimites turned back on the day of battle is not entirely clear. However, relating verses 9-11 with verses 56-68, it would seem most likely that it is the dissolution of the old cultic centre at Shiloh, the place of the tabernacle, prior to the battle of Aphek.

It maybe is the battle of Aphek that is in view here. The failure of the northern tribes came from their not keeping the covenant, which he relates to their refusal to observe the law, and from their forgetfulness of the law's works and wonders. In verses 12-16 he lists some of these works and wonders, beginning with the plagues while they were still in Egypt, the Psalmist moves to the Red Sea crossing, to the pillar of cloud and fire, to the water from the rock at Massa and also at Meribah Kadesh.

The movement, as Clifford argues, is from recounting God's mighty works of grace, to discussing the people's rebellion, to speaking of God's response and then concluding with a summary account of God's grace. Here, from the wonders of the Exodus and the wilderness, the Psalmist moves to the ungrateful rebellion of the people. Despite the grace and the power that the Lord displayed, the people merely compounded their rebellion.

They tested him in the wilderness in the incidents concerning the manna and the quail, where they directly spoke against God deriding his power to act on their behalf. A question to consider, what were some of the chief ways in which God sought to preserve the people's memory of his deliverances? John chapter 1 verses 35-42 So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak and follow Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, We have found the Messiah, which means Christ. He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, You are Simon the son of John, you shall be called Cephas, which means Peter.

Each of the gospels in their own way begins with the ministry of John the Baptist. Perhaps it is John's gospel, in chapter 1, that most emphasises this witness. In the other gospels we read about the baptism of Christ and the events that occurred at that time, as the spirit descended upon Christ and later brought him out into the wilderness, testifying to his true identity.

However, within the gospel of John, it is in the witness of John himself that this event is recalled, not within the narrative voice of the gospel writer himself. Likewise, John the Baptist is the one who introduces Christ as the Lamb of God. There is perhaps an allusion

to the Passover Lamb here.

As the Passover Lamb, Jesus is the one who is pure, without defilement and spotless. He is the one who is prepared for the sacrificial task of bearing the weight of the world's sin. In the second occasion, verse 36 is the second time that John has identified Jesus as the Lamb of God.

On the previous occasion, in verse 29, he also said that he was the one that took away the sin of the world. It is not clear that the two disciples that he speaks to here had heard that previous announcement. If they had not, then they do not have the full information that the reader does.

Nevertheless, Andrew knows enough to draw the connection between the Lamb of God and the Messiah in verse 41. The reference to the next day again, with which verse 35 begins, implies that there is a series of days, and that perhaps we should be keeping track of them. As we move through chapters 1 and 2 of the gospel of John, this succession of days emerges.

Considering the creation themes that are prominent from the very beginning of the chapter, it would seem natural to think of these in terms of creation days. Peter Lighthouse has suggested that verses 1 to 18 begin with the Light of the World, the first day of creation. The baptism of John is described in verses 19 to 28 as the division of the waters above from the waters beneath.

In Christ's baptism in verses 29 to 34, there is the emergence of dry land from the water, the dove descending like the dove descended upon the land after the flood. Day 4 is John pointing his disciples to Jesus in verses 35 to 39. Then there is the multiplication of the disciples as the disciples bring their brothers, like the creatures swarm in the seas on the fifth day of creation in verses 40 to 42.

On day 6 in verses 43 to 51, Jesus describes Nathanael as a true Israelite and himself as the Son of God. On the seventh day, the Sabbath, there is rest. Nothing occurs on that particular day.

On the third day, the first day of a new week, we have the wedding at Cana in chapter 2. We might be best holding this pattern more tentatively. The prominent creation themes throughout John chapter 1 do lend weight to it, however some of the details could be disputed, for instance that verse 40 involves a new day. John's introduction of Christ to his disciples is as the Lamb of God and this identification of Jesus as the Lamb of God is a motif that continues throughout the book in various ways.

They play out even more prominently within the book of Revelation where the Lamb is a very prominent figure. The two disciples introduced to Jesus by John in verses 35 to 37 follow Jesus. Andrew who was one of them went to find his brother Simon to get him to

join him.

The next day Philip will do the same. He will find Nathanael and say that they have found the Messiah. Verse 40 raises the question of the identity of the second of the two disciples.

Frederick Dale Bruner notes that this text could be read to imply that the two disciples of John the Baptist both went to call their brothers. Andrew went first and the mysterious other disciple went second. Some in the early church he observes inferred that the second disciple was likely John the son of Zebedee who would have called his brother James.

We see the sons of Zebedee again in the final chapter with all of its similarities with the opening one. This identification is however quite speculative and what first refers to in verse 41 is not entirely clear. Is it that Andrew before he does anything else goes to find Peter or is it that he goes first thing the next morning? Or is it the fact that he goes first of the two disciples? Or maybe he's the first of all of the disciples to summon another? It might be most likely that it's referring to a new day.

Whether that day is included in the actual sequence is a matter of some debate. Lighthart as we have seen already includes it in the sequence whereas J. Ramsey Michaels suggests that this roundabout way of speaking about it is precisely designed not to include it in the sequence. John's direction of his disciples to Jesus is part of the broader movement away from John and towards Christ.

As John later says, he must decrease and Christ must increase. His purpose is to direct his disciples towards another. The disciples go to follow Jesus but when Jesus sees them following he turns and says to them, what are you seeking? This is almost certainly more than just an incidental request.

Jesus is asking them about their deeper motivations and what they are looking for. They respond by addressing him as rabbi or teacher and asking where he is staying. They want to abide with him.

Such abiding with Christ will be a deeper theme of the Gospel of John. Jesus' response to them, come and you will see, is another statement that has deeper levels to it than it might appear on the surface. Come and you will see is an invitation to a journey of discovery, to come and to discover spiritual insight.

We see the language used with that sort of sense elsewhere in scripture. It's about four o'clock or the tenth hour and they stay with him for the rest of that day. First thing the next day Andrew goes to find his brother Simon.

Chrysostom writes of this, Andrew after having stayed with Jesus and after having learned what he did, did not keep the treasure to himself, but hurries and races to his

brother in order to let him know the good things Jesus has shared with him. But why hasn't John mentioned what they talked about? How do we know this is why they stayed with him? Observe what Andrew says to his brother. Andrew is so ecstatic when what he is looking for happens that he hurries to tell others the good news.

This is what brotherly affection, natural friendship is all about when someone is eager to extend a hand to another when it comes to spiritual matters. Andrew, although the first to come to Christ of the two, brings his brother Simon to Jesus. Simon will later be the first of the disciples, the most prominent of the twelve.

This short section began with John the Baptist looking at Jesus and directing his disciples to him, declaring his identity to be the Lamb of God. The section ends with Jesus looking at Simon and declaring that he will have a new identity. He will be called Cephas, meaning Peter or Rock.

Cephas is the Greek transliteration of the Aramaic. While John the Baptist's identification of Jesus as the Lamb of God particularly anticipates the cross of Christ, the identification of Peter as the Rock particularly anticipates his later role in the church. Here, in contrast to Matthew chapter 16, it is not Simon but Andrew that makes the declaration that Jesus is the Messiah.

Simon receives the name Peter as he does in chapter 16 of Matthew, but the significance of the fact that it is Andrew that makes this confession should be noted. A question to consider. How could we harmonise the accounts of the calling of the first disciples in the beginning of the Synoptic Gospels and the account of Andrew and Simon first following Jesus here?