7-12-20, The Holy Way

Psalm 119:105—112

1. Introduction
2. This Psalm is an acrostic and a work of art.
3. Imagine writing a poem with 26 verses and 8 lines per verse. In the first verse, the first word of each line begins with the letter A, and the verse carries a coherent, beautiful thought. Then you write the second verse of 8 lines. This time the first word of every line begins with the letter B. Again it carries a beautiful thought and it is coherent not only in itself but is coherent with the first verse. And continue through the alphabet.
4. This psalm follows that pattern through the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet and it’s exquisite!
5. The overall theme of the poem (all 176 verses) is the Psalmist’s love for God’s Torah or instruction. If you listen for them, you’ll hear 6 different words (well, one is the plural form of another) for the Instruction of God, the Torah, and each line contains some form of the word.
6. The section we’re looking at this morning is the 14th set of 8 lines each, in which the first word of each line begins with the Hebrew letter *mem* which is the first letter of words like Miriam and Moses.

II. Prayer

1. The text
2. (v. 105) Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path.
3. (v. 106) I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow your righteous *laws*.
4. (v. 107) I have suffered much; preserve my life, Lord, according to your word. [The Psalmist doesn’t give any idea what his suffering is, nor what it means two verses later when he says that he has taken his life in his hands, now what kind of snare the wicked have set for him on verse 110. This probably means different things to different readers, but many can identify with the idea.]
5. (v. 108) Accept, Lord, the willing praise of my mouth, and teach me your laws.
6. (v. 109) Though I constantly take my life in my hands, I will not forget your law.
7. (v. 110) The wicked have set a snare for me, but I have not strayed from your precepts.
8. (v. 111) Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.
9. (v. 112) My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end.
10. What shall we take away from this passage today?

The first idea I take away from this Psalm is that God’s word for us is a source of illumination, joy, and praise. For many of us, when we think of the idea of the Law, our response is a negative one. We tend to think of the Law as a structure to keep us from doing what we want to. When we’re talking about the word of God, though, this is completely wrong. The word of God beckons us, invites us, and shows us how to be the holy people of God. It is a source of joy for us, as we bask in its beauty. Our only possible response is to follow and to praise and glorify God.

A second learning from this passage is that God’s word invites us into a life-long commitment. There is an old sermon illustration that illustrates this. Preachers say that, in Alaska (or Iowa or Africa) there is a sign where a paved road gives way to a rutted dirt road. The sign allegedly says, “Pick your rut carefully; you’ll be in it for the next 50 (or 100 or 150) miles.” The illustration is probably ready to be retired, but we are invited to devote ourselves single-mindedly and with an undivided heart to following God’s instruction.

The third idea is that the Psalmist has faced, and is facing, difficult times. And yet, there is no question that the Psalmist will cling to God’s instruction. No inconvenience, no barrier, no danger will divert the Psalmist from following the Torah of God.

In a strictly technical sense, the Torah refers to the first five books of the Bible, which are sometimes called the books of Moses, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. But the instruction of God for us is much more than just these five books. We cherish, and cling to, and praise God for all the words of God, the entire Bible cover to cover. The books of history, the books of poetry, the prophetic books, the Gospels, the letters, even that strange apocalyptic book of Revelation, invite us into a closer, more authentic relationship with God. They are all a lamp for our feet and a light for our path.

And what about now, when the leadership of The Holy Way has discerned a call from the Holy Spirit to turn our attention to the destructive power of racism. Can we bring God’s word for us on this journey? Of course, we can! We can’t possibly make this journey without it.

As we read through both the Old and New Testaments, God’s concern for the disadvantaged echoes again and again. So frequently we hear of God’s concern for the widows and orphans. These were the victims of unjust systems of the day. If a woman’s husband died, her only hope for shelter and food was her son, if she had one. If she didn’t have a son, she had no kind of safety net at all.

An orphan too young to take over the family trade was in the same position. It was no one’s societal responsibility to provide care and support. And God says, again and again, “If you claim to be my people, these victims of an unjust system are your problem, not someone else’s.”

Today the systems are not the same, but there are still unjust systems and it is our responsibility as followers of Jesus the Christ to address these issues of unfairness. God’s word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

Just as the Psalmist’s commitment to God and God’s teaching is life-long, the path we’re being called to follow is a life-long one. This is not “Let’s just knock this out so we can start off fresh when we get our new pastor.” I believe that the pastor whom God is already preparing to serve The Holy Way will be committed to this journey and will lead you on it faithfully and well. This work is long-term, and difficult, and worth the time.

Sisters and brothers, it’s a rich blessing for me to be serving you at this point in our history. I’m completely sincere when I tell you that I believe God has called and brought each of you to this place for this particular moment. Will you look to the Scriptures for guidance? Will you seek the leading of the Holy Spirit? Will you walk this road with courage that comes from God? May it be so. Amen