

*Based on Psalm 111
Pentecost 18; Proper 23*

Psalm 111

1 Hallelujah!

*I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart, *
in the assembly of the upright, in the congregation.*

*2 Great are the deeds of the LORD! **

they are studied by all who delight in them.

*3 His work is full of majesty and splendor, *
and his righteousness endures for ever.*

*4 He makes his marvelous works to be remembered; *
the LORD is gracious and full of compassion.*

*5 He gives food to those who fear him; *
he is ever mindful of his covenant.*

*6 He has shown his people the power of his works *
in giving them the lands of the nations.*

*7 The works of his hands are faithfulness and justice; *
all his commandments are sure.*

*8 They stand fast for ever and ever, *
because they are done in truth and equity.*

*9 He sent redemption to his people;
he commanded his covenant for ever; *
holy and awesome is his Name.*

*10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; *
those who act accordingly have a good understanding;
his praise endures for ever.*

One of the most important points that Jesus makes, again and again, is that the key motivation for all that God does is love. Perhaps the best-known Bible verse of all time begins "For God so loved the world..." And as our Presiding Bishop often says, "if it's not about love, then it's not about God." So it's pretty well established that Jesus loves us, "for the Bible tells me so."

But here we encounter another phrase, "the fear of the Lord," that commonly pops up in the Old Testament, most famously in Proverbs where the author tells us that the "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." On its face, a fearsome God and a loving God

wouldn't seem to be the same God at all. It is such a seeming contradiction that there have been voices in every generation since Jesus suggesting that maybe there are actually two Gods, and not just one.

But the discernment of the church, leaning most heavily on the words of Jesus himself, has continued to affirm that there is just one God, even though we may have experienced God in three persons, the relationship of the three is so strong and so close, that they are clearly one.

So what are we to make of "the fear of the Lord." I believe the best analogy to understand this is to think about water. Like God, water is essential for life. To be without it rarely ends well, and it is interwoven into many parts of our lives. We cook with it, we clean with it, we use it to grow flowers and food to eat, many people like to play in it or to be near it and gaze out upon it. We love hot showers or steamy baths, we love sunsets over it, we like to imagine what may lay across it beyond the horizon.

But as we've seen in the aftermath of the recent hurricanes, water can also be terrifying and destructive. Water is also persistent and powerful enough to overcome any obstruction in time. The Grand Canyon, meanders through the southwest desert for nearly 300 miles; its cliff faces plunging a mile to the riverbed below. The rocks of the canyon were formed over 2 billion years, but the flowing Colorado river managed to carve out the canyon in just a fraction of that time. So, despite its many benefits, its persistence and awesome potential must always be respected.

And it is this respect that I think truly captures the sentiment in the phrase, the fear of the Lord. It is important for us to understand the awesome power of God and respect that, but to also appreciate how that awesome power has been deployed to our benefit because as Jesus has taught us, everything that God does, is motivated by God's love.

Blessings,

Jon