

# SUMMER STUDY OF PSALMS



Central Lutheran  
MINNEAPOLIS

Adult Faith Formation  
CENTRAL LUTHERAN CHURCH Minneapolis

## Introduction

Welcome to our summer study of the Psalms. Together we will explore this remarkable book of the Hebrew Bible – a written collection of God’s peoples’ expressions of faith and fear, trust and doubt, praise and lament.

Over the next six weeks we will experience the psalms through a number of different perspectives. We will look at them academically – that is – what do the scholars teach us about them in terms of their organization, their structure and their placement in the bible. We will also consider the psalms as prayers, liturgies, laments, hymns and poems – that is, how do we use the psalms in daily life. What about the question of God? What do we learn theologically from the psalms? And finally, we will look closely at what the psalms mean to us. How do you use them in your personal and communal life? What is your history with their words and images? How have they, how do they and how will they continue to inform us about God, the world and each of us? These are important questions for us to consider.

Martin Luther wrote of the Psalms saying that they, “might well be called a little Bible. In it is comprehended most beautifully and briefly everything that is in the entire Bible. It is really a fine enchiridion or handbook. In fact, I have a notion that the Holy Spirit wanted to take the trouble to himself [or herself] to compile a short Bible and book of examples of all Christendom or all saints, so that anyone who could not read the whole Bible would here have anyway almost an entire summary of it, comprised in one little book”.

With that as the backdrop for our course, let’s get started reading Psalms.



## **Introduction to the Psalms – Pastor Stephanie Friesen**

**Wednesday, June 17 – 6:00pm**

Christ Care Prayers

“The more deeply we grow into the psalms and the more often we pray them as our own, the more simple and rich our prayer will become.” *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

What are your earliest memories of the psalms? Do you have a favorite? Do they spark particular memories for you?

### **Psalm 1**

#### **The Two Ways**

Happy are those  
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,  
or take the path that sinners tread,  
or sit in the seat of scoffers;  
but their delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and on his law they meditate day and night.  
They are like trees  
planted by streams of water  
which yield their fruit in its season,  
and their leaves do not wither.  
In all that they do, they prosper.

The wicked are not so,  
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.  
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;  
for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.

During this session we will talk about some of the basic mechanics of the psalms. Here are some of the structures we know from scholars:

There are 150 Psalms written by several authors including David. Over time there has been debate about this but current scholarship suggests that there were many contributors to the psalms.

They are divided into five smaller books. One possible explanation for this is to mirror the five books of the Pentateuch.

- Book I (Psalm 1-41)
- Book II (Psalm 42-72)
- Book III (Psalm 73-89) ←
- Book IV (Psalm 90-106)
- Book V (Psalm 107-150)

There are 10 types of Psalms which include:

- Prayers for Help (Lament)
- Hymns of Praise
- Liturgies
- Instructional Psalms
- Songs of Thanksgiving
- Royal psalms
- Trust Psalms
- Acrostic poems
- Festival Psalms
- Historical Psalms

We will be talking about four of these ten types during this course including Trust with Pastor Melissa, Thanksgiving with Pastor Stephanie, Praise with Pastor Peter and Lament with Deacon Mark. The types are not mutually exclusive and different scholars refer to the types differently, so if you have a resourced that names or classifies the psalms differently, don't be concerned. You'll find psalm texts in more than one

classification and more than one category. For example, Psalm 50 is considered both a liturgy psalm and a festival psalm.

*Superscriptions* are the subtitles you see written in italics below or to the side of the Psalm number. They are not part of the original writings but added later to enhance content to understanding or use. You will also see the term *selah*. While its meaning is unknown, it may refer to a musical or liturgical notation.

The Hebrew name for the Psalms is *Tehillim* which is translated “praises”.

Questions for us to consider:

How do the Psalms help guide your understanding of God?

What images of God can you recall from the Psalms?

How do those images help you understand your relationship with God?

How do the words of the Psalms help you pray?

What are your individual or family stories around the Psalms?

How do the Psalms make you feel?

For next week, read the following Psalms of Trust:

Thursday: Psalm 23

Friday: Psalm 11

Saturday: Psalm 63

Sunday: Psalm 46

Monday: Psalm 16

Tuesday: Psalm: 121

## Trust Psalms – Pastor Melissa Pohlman

Wednesday, June 24- 6:00 pm

Christ Care Prayers

Tonight we consider the Trust Psalms. Typically written in the first person, they are prayers or affirmations of faith and confidence in God.

### Psalm 131

#### Song of Quiet Trust

*A Song of Ascents. Of David.*

O LORD, my heart is not lifted up,  
my eyes are not raised too high;  
I do not occupy myself with things  
too great and too marvelous for me.  
But I have calmed and quieted my soul,  
like a weaned child with its mother;  
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.<sup>[a]</sup>

O Israel, hope in the LORD  
from this time on and forevermore.

The Trust Psalms are called that because they follow a pattern of remembering the times when God has saved God's people. They function at times like a recitation of all the mighty and life-giving ways God has shown up for the author. Sometimes those moments are rather generic and at times they are very specific. A very specific example is Psalm 63 where we are told that David writes this about when he was in the wilderness of Judah.

The Trust Psalms also include a direct vow of trust. The author says, "God has done this trustworthy thing, therefore I will serve/praise/bless you, O God." There is something the author says they will do in response to God's trustworthiness.

Finally, in some Trust Psalms there are examples of other people who have not trusted the Lord or turned to other gods. We hear how it has not gone well for them. Psalm 16 tells us, "Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows."

I know it has been a while since we have heard the Eucharistic Prayer in worship, but if we can remember together, it too has a similar pattern to a Trust Psalm. Eucharistic prayers often recite many of God's saving acts and ends with Jesus' promises in his last meal with his friends, talk about a God who is worthy to be praised and then invokes the Holy Spirit so that we might be able to live as God's people through how this meal strengthens us.

Now, what's completely unfair is that I chose a Trust Psalm that does not follow this pattern tonight as my favorite of all the Psalms. Psalm 131 came into my life during a particularly difficult year when I had to work very hard at containing my ego and my agenda so that the whole community I belonged to could continue to function. Psalm 131 is a Trust Psalm in that the author places themselves in a quiet and trusting place in God knowing that like a child nursing at their mother's breast there is not where safer and more loving to be. The author knows they must be quiet and still to be able to receive this nourishment from a loving, trustworthy God who provides.

Questions for us to consider:

When have you trusted God most fully?

What are the differences between faith and trust?

How do the problems we are facing lead us to trust?

How is trust built both in our lives and in the Psalms?

What are some of the challenges of this world that make it hard for us to trust each other and God?

Consider writing your own Trust Psalm or Eucharistic Prayer this week. I'd love to read them!

For next week read the following Psalms of Thanksgiving:

Thursday: Psalm 67

Friday: Psalm 92

Saturday: Psalm 40

Sunday: Psalm 66

Monday: Psalm 107

Tuesday: Psalm 75

## **Songs of Thanksgiving – Pastor Stephanie Friesen**

**Wednesday, July 1 - 6:00 pm**

Christ Care Prayers

Tonight we will study the Songs of Thanksgiving. These Psalms have some element of thanks and praise for things like a return to good health, a plentiful harvest or deliverance from a condition that once caused lament.

One can imagine that when we emerge from the Coronavirus, we will all write Psalms of Thanksgiving.

One way scholars have looked at these psalms is through the lens of orientation vs. disorientation. When we consider the times in our lives that cause us to wait – those times that generate a sense of anxiety and fear, we express words of doubt and trepidation. One of the characteristics of a Thanksgiving Psalm is an expression of uncertainty. There is a beautiful example of this in Psalm 107 beginning at verse 4 that says,

“Some wandered in desert wastes

finding no way to an inhabited town;

hungry and thirsty

their soul fainted within them.

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,

and he delivered them from their distress;

he led them by a straight way

until they reached an inhabited town.

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,

for his wonderful works to humankind.

For he satisfies the thirsty,

and the hungry he fills with good things.

Clues of disorientation:

Clues of reorientation:

The Psalms of Thanksgiving told the stories of triumph over hardship from generation to generation. Many of them were chanted or sung as a way to teach the community about God's love for them and about God's presence among them.

In what ways did you learn about God in your childhood and formative years? What are you still learning about God now?

Now let's look at Psalm 30 together. As we read together, what are the images or descriptions of distress or disorientation? What are the images and statement of reorientation? What stands out for you?

### **Psalm 30**

#### **Thanksgiving for Recovery from Grave Illness**

*A Psalm. A Song at the dedication of the temple. Of David.*

I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up,  
and did not let my foes rejoice over me.

O LORD my God, I cried to you for help,  
and you have healed me.  
O LORD, you brought up my soul from Sheol,  
restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.

Sing praises to the LORD, O you his faithful ones,  
and give thanks to his holy name.  
For his anger is but for a moment;  
his favor is for a lifetime.  
Weeping may linger for the night,  
but joy comes with the morning.

As for me, I said in my prosperity,  
"I shall never be moved."  
By your favor, O LORD,  
you had established me as a strong mountain;  
you hid your face;  
I was dismayed.

To you, O LORD, I cried,  
and to the LORD I made supplication:  
"What profit is there in my death,  
if I go down to the Pit?  
Will the dust praise you?  
Will it tell of your faithfulness?  
Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me!  
O LORD, be my helper!"

You have turned my mourning into dancing;  
you have taken off my sackcloth  
and clothed me with joy,  
so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.  
O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

Do we know why the writer is giving thank and praise to God? What clues do we have?

What are the words and images that draw us into understanding the writer's distress?

What are the words and images that draw us into understanding the writer's recovery?

What experiences have you had that cause this psalm to resonate with you? When have you been in the pit or sheol?

How has God turned your mourning into dancing? What was your response?

For next week read the following Psalms of Praise:

Thursday: Psalm 145

Friday: Psalm 146

Saturday: Psalm 147

Sunday: Psalm 148-149

Monday: Psalm 95-96

Tuesday: Psalm 97, 98 and 99

Wednesday: Psalm 100

## **Hymns of Praise – Pastor Peter Nycklemoe**

**Wednesday, July 8 – 6:00pm**

### **Christ Care Prayers**

In this session we will explore the communal Psalms of praise. Like the Songs of Thanksgiving, these Psalms address God as one worthy and deserving of our praise. Common words include rejoice, praise, sing, glory and joy.

### **Psalm 150 – Hymn of Praise and Doxology**

<sup>1</sup>Praise the LORD!

Praise God in the sanctuary;  
praise God in the mighty firmament!

<sup>2</sup>Praise God for the mighty deeds;  
praise God according to the LORD's surpassing greatness!

<sup>3</sup>Praise God with trumpet sound;  
praise God with lute and harp!  
<sup>4</sup>Praise God with tambourine and dance;  
praise God with strings and pipe!  
<sup>5</sup>Praise God with clanging cymbals;  
praise God with loud clashing cymbals!  
<sup>6</sup>Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!  
Praise the LORD!

### **Academic component: what do the scholars say?**

We have paused to consider that the Psalms arise from two of the foundational moments in life:

1. When life is “laden with tears,” and we lament
2. When life is a gift and we “offer thanks and praise.”

Sometimes our lament or praise is personal, individual. Sometimes our lament or praise is communal. The Psalms of praise, specifically the communal Psalms of praise are clustered in two specific sections in the Book of Psalms: Psalms 95-100 and 146-150.

I have been shaped by the academic or scholarly reading of the Psalms within the canonical approach. This approach is to take the whole of the Psalms and how they are organized as an important way to learn and grow in faith. It is to remember that the Psalms are a prayer book, and that communities of faith pray the Psalms in their entirety throughout the year. My seminary teacher, Dr. James Limburg, was shaped in this academic approach. It is the approach of James Mays, Erich Zenger and J. Clinton McCann. When we study a particular Psalm, we are to pay close attention to the section of the Psalms and certainly the other Psalms around the one we are reading/praying.

As we turn to the Psalms of Praise, we can ponder this approach by looking at Psalm 145. This Psalm of Praise closes with verse 21: “My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and all flesh will bless God’s name forever and ever.” It is a beautiful affirmation of faith and can certainly stand alone. If we close the Bible and do not read/pray on, we miss the arc of what is happening in the Book of Psalms. What follows are the final Psalms, all words of praise. Psalm 146 puts the words of praise in our “mouths.” Psalm 147 opens us to “speak praise” for what God does for us. Psalm 148 names the “flesh” that will bless, because God has blessed “your children.” Psalm 149 names all that praises. Psalm 150 puts the final words of praise in our mouths and the whole of the

Book of Psalms ends with “praise the Lord.” The final word of praise draws us back to Psalm 1 and the opening words, “happy are they.”

### **Theological component: what do we learn about God?**

Anne Lamott is a favorite author of many, she says it like it is and opens us to God. One of her beloved books is *Help, Thanks, Wow: Three Essential Prayers*. Two favorite quotes open us to what we learn about God and ourselves when we offer praise are:

“If I were going to begin practicing the presence of God for the first time today, it would help to begin by admitting the three most terrible truths of our existence: that we are so ruined, and so loved, and in charge of so little.”

“Gratitude begins in our hearts and then dovetails into behavior. It almost always makes you willing to be of service, which is where the joy resides. It means that you are willing to stop being such a jerk. When you are aware of all that has been given to you, in your lifetime and the past few days, it is hard not to be humbled, and pleased to give back.”

In moments of trust, thanksgiving and lament we experience God. In the Psalms of trust and lament, there is a movement from loss, the cry of anger and pain, the statement of hope and then affirmation. In the Psalms of thanksgiving, something has happened and the individual and community return thanks to God. The Psalms of Praise open us to God in their own way. Praise is the place where we do confess that “we are ruined, loved and in charge of so little.” Praise is the place where thanksgiving begins to shape behavior, opening us to the deep well of joy that leads us to “give back.” When we sing and pray our praise, we are not saying we know it will all turn out the way we want or hope, but that God will be faithful. Praise is the beautiful confession: “God is good. All the time.” It is a confession, a song, a prayer and a longing even, and especially, when it does not feel like it at the time.

When we praise God, we experience a God who is faithful and who does restore us and the world to the place of joy.

### **Experiential component: what about the psalm resonates for us individually and communally?**

At nearly every funeral planning meeting the family asks for the closing hymn to a one of celebration, praise and hope. The funeral service moves from lament, to hope, on to thanksgiving and then to praise. Even in these non-singing, covid-19 days, the songs of

praise are on your lips and in your hearts. You don't need to know one of the Psalms of Praise to know the hymns of praise:

From hymn #819-896, our ELW closes with hymns of praise, just like the Book of Psalms that begin our hymn numbering.

"Come all you people, come and praise the Most High"

"Cantad al Senor"

"You servants of God, your Master proclaim"

"Immortal, Invisible, God only wise"

"Joyful, joyful We adore thee"

"Beautiful savior, King of creation"

"Now thank we all our God, with hearts and hands and voices"

"Praise the one who breaks the darkness"

"When morning gilds the skies, my heart awakening cries"

"Crown him with many crowns"

"O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder"

"Praise to the Lord the Almighty the king of creation"

"In thee is gladness amid all sadness, Jesus, sunshine of my heart"

"Let the whole creation cry, glory to the Lord on high"

"Let all things now living as song of thanksgiving"

"Oh for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise"

As we have "sung" through these first lines, and not even all of them, what has been stirred up? Even in the moments of loss and uncertainty, how does a Psalm or hymn of Praise open you to God and the restoration of joy?

Questions to consider:

Do any of these hymns connect you to a moment in time? What was going on? How does the hymn open you to God throughout the journey of your life?

Why is it an affirmation of faith and hope to go out from a funeral singing words of praise?

How do you define joy? Praise opens us to the gift of joy, but joy in a life of faith is different than happiness.

How do you understand the difference between thanksgiving and praise? When it is important to say thank you and when it is important to offer praise?

Do we offer thanksgiving on a regular basis? How about praise, do we offer genuine words of praise to God?

As you reflect on the Psalms of Praise you may have had the chance to read/pray this week, do you have a favorite? What caught your imagination in the Psalm and why?

For next week read the following Psalms of Lament:

Thursday: Psalm 51

Friday: Psalm 3

Saturday: Psalm 88

Sunday: Psalm 22

Monday: Psalm 13

Tuesday: Psalm 120

### **Psalms of Lament – Deacon Mark Sedio**

**Wednesday, July 15 – 6:00 pm**

Christ Care Prayers

Our conversation tonight centers on Prayers for Help or the Lament Psalms. There are more lament psalms than any other type. There are two types of Lament Psalms –

individual laments and communal laments. While beginning with a complaint or expression of displeasure with God, many of these psalms resolve their complaints with an expression of trust or recollection of God's saving acts from the past.

## **Individual Lament**

### **Psalm 130**

#### **Waiting for Divine Redemption**

##### **A Song of Ascents.**

<sup>1</sup>Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

<sup>2</sup> Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive  
to the voice of my supplications!

<sup>3</sup>If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,  
Lord, who could stand?

<sup>4</sup>But there is forgiveness with you,  
so that you may be revered.

<sup>5</sup>I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,  
and in his word I hope;

<sup>6</sup>my soul waits for the Lord  
more than those who watch for the morning,  
more than those who watch for the morning.

<sup>7</sup>O Israel, hope in the LORD!  
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,  
and with him is great power to redeem.

<sup>8</sup>It is he who will redeem Israel  
from all its iniquities.

## Communal Lament

### Psalm 44

#### National Lament and Prayer for Help

To the leader. Of the Korahites. A Maskil.

- <sup>1</sup>We have heard with our ears, O God,  
our ancestors have told us,  
what deeds you performed in their days,  
in the days of old:
- <sup>2</sup>you with your own hand drove out the nations,  
but them you planted;  
you afflicted the peoples,  
but them you set free;
- <sup>3</sup>for not by their own sword did they win the land,  
nor did their own arm give them victory;  
but your right hand, and your arm,  
and the light of your countenance,  
for you delighted in them.
- <sup>4</sup>You are my King and my God;  
you command<sup>[a]</sup> victories for Jacob.
- <sup>5</sup>Through you we push down our foes;  
through your name we tread down our assailants.
- <sup>6</sup>For not in my bow do I trust,  
nor can my sword save me.
- <sup>7</sup>But you have saved us from our foes,  
and have put to confusion those who hate us.
- <sup>8</sup>In God we have boasted continually,  
and we will give thanks to your name forever.*Selah*
- <sup>9</sup>Yet you have rejected us and abased us,  
and have not gone out with our armies.
- <sup>10</sup>You made us turn back from the foe,  
and our enemies have gotten spoil.
- <sup>11</sup>You have made us like sheep for slaughter,  
and have scattered us among the nations.

- <sup>12</sup> You have sold your people for a trifle,  
demanding no high price for them.
- <sup>13</sup> You have made us the taunt of our neighbors,  
the derision and scorn of those around us.
- <sup>14</sup> You have made us a byword among the nations,  
a laughingstock<sup>[b]</sup> among the peoples.
- <sup>15</sup> All day long my disgrace is before me,  
and shame has covered my face
- <sup>16</sup> at the words of the taunters and revilers,  
at the sight of the enemy and the avenger.
- <sup>17</sup> All this has come upon us,  
yet we have not forgotten you,  
or been false to your covenant.
- <sup>18</sup> Our heart has not turned back,  
nor have our steps departed from your way,
- <sup>19</sup> yet you have broken us in the haunt of jackals,  
and covered us with deep darkness.
- <sup>20</sup> If we had forgotten the name of our God,  
or spread out our hands to a strange god,
- <sup>21</sup> would not God discover this?  
For he knows the secrets of the heart.
- <sup>22</sup> Because of you we are being killed all day long,  
and accounted as sheep for the slaughter.
- <sup>23</sup> Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord?  
Awake, do not cast us off forever!
- <sup>24</sup> Why do you hide your face?  
Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?
- <sup>25</sup> For we sink down to the dust;  
our bodies cling to the ground.
- <sup>26</sup> Rise up, come to our help.  
Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love.

## Psalm 139

### The Inescapable God

*To the leader. Of David. A Psalm.*

- <sup>1</sup> O LORD, you have searched me and known me.  
<sup>2</sup> You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
    you discern my thoughts from far away.  
<sup>3</sup> You search out my path and my lying down,  
    and are acquainted with all my ways.  
<sup>4</sup> Even before a word is on my tongue,  
    O LORD, you know it completely.  
<sup>5</sup> You hem me in, behind and before,  
    and lay your hand upon me.  
<sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
    it is so high that I cannot attain it.
- <sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your spirit?  
    Or where can I flee from your presence?  
<sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
    if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
<sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the morning  
    and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
<sup>10</sup> even there your hand shall lead me,  
    and your right hand shall hold me fast.  
<sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
    and the light around me become night,"  
<sup>12</sup> even the darkness is not dark to you;  
    the night is as bright as the day,  
    for darkness is as light to you.
- <sup>13</sup> For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
    you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
<sup>14</sup> I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
    Wonderful are your works;  
    that I know very well.  
<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you,  
    when I was being made in secret,  
    intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

<sup>16</sup>Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.  
In your book were written  
    all the days that were formed for me,  
    when none of them as yet existed.

<sup>17</sup>How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
    How vast is the sum of them!

<sup>18</sup>I try to count them—they are more than the sand;  
    I come to the end—I am still with you.

<sup>19</sup>O that you would kill the wicked, O God,  
    and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me—

<sup>20</sup>those who speak of you maliciously,  
    and lift themselves up against you for evil!

<sup>21</sup>Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?  
    And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?

<sup>22</sup>I hate them with perfect hatred;  
    I count them my enemies.

<sup>23</sup>Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
    test me and know my thoughts.

<sup>24</sup>See if there is any wicked way in me,  
    and lead me in the way everlasting.

## **Liturgies, Historical & Royal Psalms – Pastor Stephanie Friesen**

**Wednesday, July 22 – 6:00 pm**

Christ Care Prayers

Author and scholar N. T. Wright writes, “The Psalms offer us a way of joining in a chorus of praise and prayer that has been going on for millennia and across all cultures.”

Today, we will finish up with a discussion of several other types of psalms and then finish with final thoughts.

The three types of psalms we'd like to touch on are liturgies, historical and royal psalms. Each tells us something about God, God's people and the relationship between the them.

The psalms that we put into a classification of a *liturgy* indicates that the psalm was likely used during festivals and other worship experiences. Psalms that contain refrains, like Psalm 136 which repeats "for his steadfast love endures forever" is a good example of a liturgy. One can imagine using this psalm as a litany before or during worship to acknowledge what God has done for us. While liturgical in nature, it also recounts the history of God's people which means it can also be classified as a psalm of sacred history.

Historical psalms have their own classification as well. Psalm 78 recounts The Red Sea for us – as do many other psalms. This is how the story of God's people was passed from generation to generation – especially as there were few writings that survived ancient times.

Both liturgies and history psalms are thought to have been songs that were sung as people made their way to Jerusalem for festivals. Singing serves a two-fold purpose for these sojourners. First of all, they are instructional in nature – teaching those who sing to remember their ancestors and to learn about God. And second, they helped with the cadence of the journey. Groups of travelers – whether hiking, paddling or just walking move along better while singing.

Royal psalms focus on the reigning King of Israel – not God. They typically call our attention to situations in which the king is recognized and honored. For example, Psalm 72 is a prayer for the king to rule with the same wisdom, authority and grace as that of God the creator.

There is a text in Deuteronomy called the Shema. It is Moses' call to the people to teach their children and their children's children of their ancestors and about God. It says this,

<sup>4</sup>Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. <sup>5</sup>You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

<sup>6</sup> Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. <sup>7</sup> Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. <sup>8</sup> Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, <sup>9</sup> and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

One of the beautiful things that the Psalms do for us is give us language and stories to both share and teach of God's presence in, with and among us. Let's take a look at Psalm 77:

- <sup>11</sup> I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD;  
I will remember your wonders of old.
- <sup>12</sup> I will meditate on all your work,  
and muse on your mighty deeds.
- <sup>13</sup> Your way, O God, is holy.  
What god is so great as our God?
- <sup>14</sup> You are the God who works wonders;  
you have displayed your might among the peoples.
- <sup>15</sup> With your strong arm you redeemed your people,  
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. *Selah*
- <sup>16</sup> When the waters saw you, O God,  
when the waters saw you, they were afraid;  
the very deep trembled.
- <sup>17</sup> The clouds poured out water;  
the skies thundered;  
your arrows flashed on every side.
- <sup>18</sup> The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind;  
your lightnings lit up the world;  
the earth trembled and shook.
- <sup>19</sup> Your way was through the sea,  
your path, through the mighty waters;  
yet your footprints were unseen.
- <sup>20</sup> You led your people like a flock  
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

While also considered a psalm of lament, notice the recall of God's action among the people? Notice at verse 13 that we hear the words, "your way, O God, is holy." These words remind us that unlike the other gods, our God is in relationship with us – tending to us as God's children – caring for us tenderly and fighting for us fiercely.

The psalms are a beautiful collection of our relationship with God who is holy, and in our relationship with God, we become God's holy people. The images and stories we experience in these 150 texts help us understand and celebrate our history as assure us that the story of God's people continues to be told.

As we now finish our thoughts on the Psalms, let's talk about what we've learned.

What have you learned about the structure and composition about the Psalms that you didn't know before? What was surprising? What was comforting?

What did you learn about God through the Psalms? What were the images of God that stood out for you?

How will you hear the Psalms differently as we continue to read them in worship and in daily life?

We encourage you – if you haven't already – to memorize one of these beautiful psalm texts. They will comfort and sustain you and they will give you words of thanks and praise.