

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

THE WORSHIP OF GOD • FEBRUARY 17, 2019

Psalm Litany

Based on Psalm 1

Happy are those who do not follow evil doers
or walk the path that leads to destruction.

**Real delight comes with walking
in the way of God, meditating on it day and night.**

Such people are like well-watered trees that bear much fruit.

They not only talk about faith, but practice it.

Let us pray:

**Lord, you are intimately acquainted with the way of the righteous.
When we stray, draw us back with forgiveness and grace. Amen.**

The Scripture

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Thus says the LORD: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the LORD. They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse— who can understand it? I the LORD test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.

The Message

Intimately Acquainted

Nick Larson and Terry Overfelt

Big Love: In Identifying our willful tendencies to carry and stuff down our burdens, we realize God's longing to work through them with us in all knowing intimacy for goodness.

[Walking in carrying the knapsack full of stones, dropping it on the chancel.]

Nick: I'm so done; not carrying this alone anymore. I'm done.

So many of us are carrying around the largest and most difficult moments, times and feelings that are the human ache.

Terry: Last week, we explored together the imagery of wandering through the woods along a path towards the bridge. Humanity is in desperate need of retreat, retreat to find rest, retreat to be embraced in community and retreat to find God.

Our Scripture from Jeremiah, this morning, tells us that God knows we will find ourselves cursed not by God, but by our willfulness to lean on our own human understanding and willful tendencies to just cope with and dismiss our brokenness and sin. Rocks carried and stuffed down in the bag!

The prophet Jeremiah describes those who depend on mere human strength as a shrub in the desert, a shallowly rooted; dry, parched tumbleweed that cannot survive in an uninhabited salt land.

Yet in this morning's litany we hear Psalm 1 sing of God who is longing to heal and restore us to true happiness by loving the Lord's instruction.

The truly happy "recite God's Instruction day and night" and it becomes them. It becomes them.

And isn't this beautiful; they are "Like a tree re-planted...re-planted-which means we didn't start there, by streams of water, which bears fruit at just the right time and whose leaves don't fade.

The psalmist closes with, "The Lord is **intimately acquainted**" with these.

Nick: Our natural tendency is to rely upon apparent human sources of power and control which render us *insufficiently rooted* for the trials that confront us. Often within our own lives, we find ourselves living into our false self-patterns. This is in contrast to our true-selfpatterns, meaning our created, divine nature. These is what Jeremiah declares when we are, "rooted by the stream of God."

"Many of us are deeply, hauntingly aware of our false-self patterns, all the ways we have learned how to avoid relinquishing ourselves to God." In this bag of burdens, we are carrying the stones that keep us from healing our human ache. Many of us already know them.

Nick: We know them as the need to be...perfect. (*pulling out each stone*)

Terry: The need to be needed. (stone)

Nick: The need to succeed. (stone)

Terry: The need to be special. (stone)

Nick: The need to know. (stone)

Terry: The need for security. (stone)

Nick: The need to avoid pain. (stone)

Terry: The need to be against. (stone)

Nick: The need to avoid conflict. (stone)

Nick: These nine, weighty stones strap us with unnecessary, unholy burdens.

These nine stones, are identified as our shadow sides in the ancient wisdom of the Enneagram, first developed by our Christian desert mothers and fathers. We are illustrating them using Ruth Haley Barton and Richard Rohr's descriptions. These false patterns are our way of attempting to defend ourselves and avoid our intrinsic anxieties. These are our recognizable, conditioned responses to the hurt we all encounter. They are attempting to protect our blessed created nature.

Terry: In solitude or retreating before Christ, God invites us to face these false patterns. However we choose to get in touch with these stony burdens, Christ invites us to identify our willful tendencies, to face and look inside them, so that we will be able to let them go.

And that's not easy.

Terry: Listen to The Knapsack by Ruth Haley Barton

*Nick: I am not good at grieving my losses
and moving on.*

*I carry them in a knapsack
hanging heavy on my chest.*

Doesn't everyone see me stoop beneath the weight?

Terry: Don't you ever get to put it down? Someone asks.

*Nick: No, I reply, it is with me always,
more present on most days than God's self.*

Terry: Grief gets added every day, or so it seems.

Oh, it's o.k., I say.

*It's just one more grief to tuck into my knapsack.
I've learned how to walk with heaviness around my neck.*

I know how to enter rooms

back straight

smile bright

as though nothing was hanging there.

Nick: But today I am tired.
The weight of accumulated grief
is more than I can carry.
Where does one go to unpack grief?

Terry: To take out each loss
and hold it in your hand
to wonder where it goes
and then put it in its place?

Nick: I don't cry about my grief anymore,
although there are always tears
behind my eyes.
The tears are stuck inside now-
like stones in a graveyard.
They have settled heavy
into the landscape of my life.

Terry: I've heard that depression is the refusal to mourn.
I don't know how to mourn in a way that helps.
I don't know how.
God, if you would show me – I would do it.
If you would take me to a place
where I could truly mourn,
I would walk in – I think.

Nick: I would walk into that graveyard
and lay myself down on the grave
of each and every dead thing
and let my tears fall into the earth.

Both: And then, I would get up.
and walk out, into my life.

Nick: In our lives we all recognize these nine types of stones, which represent false selves that keep us from truly looking:

1. This one is **the need to be perfect**: It is our attempts of getting “it” right. In this false self, we see each mistake or problem in the world as a stone to be added to our personal knapsack. *Notice* how it feels to enter into the imperfection that is in front of you. To relinquish the impulse to fix or improve. *Rather* than fixing those

mistakes, ask God to show you the beauty and wildness around you, because that, too, can be deeply moving.

2. Terry: Here is **the need to be needed**: It is our attempt to be important in the solutions of others. *Notice* how it feels to be served rather than to serve. *Rather* than focusing on what you can do for others, be present to your own needs, trusting God and others to meet you in that place. If the impulse arises to help or serve others, ask God to show you what you might be avoiding within yourself that needs attention, love, and care.
3. Nick: This one is **the need to succeed**. It is our attempt to maintain a certain personal image or position above all else. *Notice* how it feels to let out your emotional vulnerability and insecurity. *Rather* than focusing on managing your image, notice yourself beyond all your doing – even if it is uncomfortable, and just be, because God already loves you.
4. Terry: This is **the need to be special**. It is our attempt to feel and look unique. *Notice* any attempts to draw attention to yourself, from appearance, to hoping for special treatment. Surrender your need to be, or be seen as special and face the undercurrent of sadness and emptiness that often runs beneath everything. Mourn your losses. Experience how special it is to be normal.
5. Nick: Here is **the need to know**. It is our attempt to rely on information and knowledge in order to master life. *Notice* any attempts to hold back and observe because the picture seems not yet complete. *Rather* choose to engage fully. Relinquish your need for more information and enter into whatever experiences are offered – whether you understand them or not. Feel your feelings. Be in your body. Experience God rather than just know about God.
6. Terry: Here I hold **the need for security**. It is our attempt to be predictable and safe. Notice your nature to prefer structure and beliefs that help you feel secure while being afraid to risk moving outside this security. When you feel mistrust toward something new, be it a person or idea, let go of the need to judge or be right. Open something that challenges your theology or belief to a wondering of whether God might have something for you. Use your anxiousness as an invitation to trust God and your own inner authority right there in that place.
7. Nick: This is **the need to avoid pain**. It is our attempt to always feel fabulous. *Notice* your vulnerability to anxiety, loneliness, and other difficult feelings. Turn to face whatever emotion inside of you, relinquishing the superficial addiction to pleasure. *Rather* embrace the deeper joy that comes through communion with God. Leave behind your entertainment and simplify your options. Experience the joy of absence, face your dark side, and find God there.

8. Terry: Here I hold **the need to be against**. It is our attempt to always remain independent and to take care of ourselves. *Notice* your inclination to oppose or even create conflict because you feel more comfortable in a fight than a submission to goodness. *Rather* trust the good things that can happen in the peace and quiet and not just when you are opposing. Experience your weakness, tenderness, and vulnerability. Be a child in God's presence. When tears come do not be afraid that you are soft, but receive tears as if the gift. They are an indication that you are soft in the best way...malleable toward God and what is happening in you.

9. Nick: I have **the need to avoid conflict**. It is our attempt to never disturb harmony, to seek balance in all things, to avoid conflict at all cost. Relinquish your deep desire to avoid and *Notice* those places where God might be asking you to come forward and fight for something that matters. *Rather* seek God's given passion and purpose already inside of you. Seek the areas in which God is asking you to use your gifts to transform the world.

Terry: These stones weigh us down in the attempts to offer up our burdens, to the holy one, who will help us to heal and process each one. We all have the assurance from the prophet Jeremiah that if we are rooted securely in good water, we shall not fear... when the heat comes, our leaves shall stay green. Even in the years of drought, we need not be anxious; we can still bear fruit.

Nick: Our task, as followers of Christ, is to face our own needs, our own false selves, our fears. We need to take the space and time to see them, consider them, so that with the grace of God, we can put down the heavy stones, that have unduly weighted the troubles in our knapsack.

We want to leave you with another story, one that illustrates the work of retreat, the work God is inviting each of us to do. It is adapted from an old German folktale, a parable called, "Bundles."

Terry: There once was a woman who had so many problems, so many worries, so many troubles... that at times she felt she had more troubles than anyone else in the world!

Nick: One night she turned out her light, pulled up the covers and fell asleep... and she dreamed a dream...

She found herself in a vast candlelit cavern, surrounded by gray bundles of all shapes and sizes, as far as she could see. Walking toward her was a woman with flowing long white hair and dressed in a long dark cape.

Terry: "Who are you?" asked the dreamer "and what is this place?"

Nick: "This is the cave of the bundles of troubles and I am the keeper of the cave."

Terry: "Bundles of troubles?"

Nick: "Yes," the keeper explained, "Each person who walks the earth carries a bundle of trouble on their left shoulder."

Terry: The dreamer turned to look and there was a gray bundle on her left shoulder – it had been there all this time and she never noticed!"

Nick: "If you wish," the keeper continued, "you can take your bundle down and exchange it for another."

Terry: "Really? I can?" The woman lowered the bundle from her shoulder. Oh, it felt so good to put it down. Then she began picking up different bundles, feeling their weight, trying them on for size... She did repeatedly until finally she said "May I take this one? This one feels just right."

Nick: "Certainly you may," the keeper told her, "but first, why don't you open it up and look inside."

Terry: So, the woman put the bag down and pulled on the gray drawstrings and looked inside... But she could not bear the worries that she uncovered there. She took another, and another, and each time, she was completely distraught at the troubles that seemed unbearable.

Nick: At long last, she sighed a sort of surrendering, and turned to pick up her own bundle, the one she had carried with aching familiarity. The keeper of the cave smiled softly and nodded. "Why don't you look inside?"

Terry: She pulled on those old familiar drawstrings and looked with new eyes willing to face those troubles inside and not turn away; a new heart full of reclaiming strength that made them knowingly hers to bear.

Nick: The keeper whispered softly, "That's usually what happens..." As all the gray bundles faded away, even the cave was gone.

Terry: And the woman found herself sitting up in her own bed with the morning sun streaming through the window, shining upon her face.

N: Thanks be to God.

T: Amen.

Benediction

Terry: May you awake tomorrow, ready to carry your own bundle, your own knapsack, that you may place its contents before your God, trusting that as you pick it back up again, you will be strengthened for the days ahead. May you aid each other, encourage each other, and find yourself rooted beside the good waters of God.

Nick: It's all that easy, and it's all that hard. Go in peace.