

To behold the Lord

St Philips Anglican Church, O'Connor
Homily for mid-week eucharist—Thursday 17 October 2024

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Ephesians 1.1-10, Psalm 98, Luke 11.47-54

The letter to the Ephesians starts with a joyful praise of God: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places . . .”. Paul praises God because God has chosen us in Christ to be God’s children, redeemed us through his blood, and forgiven our trespasses, by the riches of God’s grace.

Then the letter says: “With all wisdom and insight, he has *made known to us* the mystery of his will, according to his *good pleasure* that he set forth in Christ.” God, the letter says, is *pleased* to make God’s will known to us. God *wants* us to know him in Jesus Christ.

We find a similar thing in today’s psalm, Psalm 98.

O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvellous things.
His right hand and his holy arm have gained him victory.
The Lord has *made known* his victory;
he has *revealed* his vindication in the sight of the nations.
He has *remembered* his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel.
All the ends of the earth *have seen* the victory of our God.

God wants to be seen. God desires that we know him, that understand, and that we receive God’s love and faithfulness.

What a contrast to the situation condemned by Jesus in Luke chapter 11, when he attacks the scribes, the lawyers!

If you engage a good lawyer, you expect the lawyer to explain the law relevant to your situation, to simplify it perhaps, and to help you to understand.

The lawyers Jesus criticises did the opposite. Instead of helping the people to know and love the straight pathways of God, they made it increasingly difficult and complex, using their specialised knowledge to exalt and enrich themselves “Woe also to you lawyers! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not lift a finger to ease them.”

Jesus says that his hearers will be charged with the “blood of all the prophets shed since the foundation of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary.” What would those prophets have been doing between the altar and the sanctuary.? We can get an idea, perhaps, from Joel 2.17 which says, “Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep. Let them say, ‘Spare your people, O Lord’”.

In other words, Jesus is condemning the lawyers, the scribes, the pharisees, because of their disregard of prophets who interceded for God’s people, prophets who reached out to God asking for God’s help.

As well as obscuring and complicating the ordinary people’s understanding of the law, God’s pathway, the lawyers failed even to use their knowledge to approach God themselves. “Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.”

In Psalm 27.4, David says: “One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.” At the beginning of that psalm, David says that: “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”

David asks that God will teach him the right paths. And he is confident that he will know God’s way. The psalm concludes: “I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!”

The scriptures assure us again and again that, in Jesus, we can know and see God. If we are puzzled, confused, or simply want to know and be with God, let’s be confident that God does lead us, teach us, and show himself to us as our loving heavenly Father.