

Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church
Brillion, WI

Last Sunday in End Times
Nov. 20 and 24, 2013

Psalm 63:1-5

O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.

I have a terrible habit of clicking on articles that compare the U.S to other countries. I have some kind of inner compulsion to prove to myself that this is definitely the best place to live in the world. That's why I was disappointed when early this fall the Earth Institute of Columbia University released their study entitled *The 2013 World Happiness Report*. According to that study people in northern Europe have higher levels of wellbeing than people in the U.S. Denmark came in #1 followed quickly by Norway, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Sweden. The U.S. straggled in at 17th place behind Mexico and way behind Canada. That's, of course, incredibly interesting. For a place having the world's largest economy and the freedom to pursue happiness, we sure struggle to find a sense of wellbeing.

What should we do about it? CNN had some simple advice. "Those looking for greater happiness and satisfaction in life should head to northern Europe." I don't buy that. I doubt you do either. And God certainly doesn't. In this lead-up to Thanksgiving, we're looking at what God says to us about knowing and believing that we're blessed. Last week, we talked about how we're blessed with far more than we need. This week in Psalm 63 we're diving even deeper into our sense of wellbeing. We're going to find out that we're blessed no matter where we are or what's happening to us.

That's true even if we're people on the run with a bounty on our heads. Seriously. Even if powerful people are out to assassinate us. Crazy, right? Believe it because it's happened before. I'll prove it to you. I know it's the subscript to the Psalm, but in the Hebrew Bible it's actually verse 1 of the Psalm. Here's the psalm writer's notation: "**A psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah.**" (v. 1) I can tell you this. Being in the Desert of Judah is no picnic. I was there once. It's one awful, barren place. It's there where the king of the land, Saul, was out for blood. Saul was thinking, "I want David dead or alive, but I want him mostly dead." And so Saul put on a massive manhunt for David forcing him to scuttle from one cave to another.

Put yourself in David's shoes. You have a huge risk of PTSD. You are under incredible pressure. You have little to no chance for a sense of wellbeing. At least, that's what you'd think. A guy under threat of assassination and the subject of a massive manhunt should be nervous, afraid, and hurting. That's normally what happens when you're under that kind of attack. Let me give you some proof. Guess

which country suffered the biggest decline in wellbeing last year. Egypt. And yet, it's still true that a man hiding from an assassin in some dark, awful cave can write a Psalm all about wellbeing and knowing God's blessing.

Tell me God's not trying to teach us something through that. What is it? He's showing us that we've got a default setting when it comes to trying to sense our own blessedness and it's wrong. Have you ever thought about what our default setting is? The default is to compare ourselves to others. It makes twisted sense in a way. The only baseline we think we have in gauging blessedness is to see if we're more or less blessed than someone else. So we say to ourselves, "I have more than that guy." And then we feel good about that. Or we say, "She has a better job than me." And then we feel badly about that. That's our default setting. It's our natural way of trying to discover how blessed we are. We compare ourselves to others.

So in the words of a good friend of mine let me ask you this: how's that going? There was a study done on Facebook users recently that gives us a firm answer to this. Here's what the researchers found: Because Facebook users endlessly compared themselves to others, they suffered lots of envy and loneliness. People viewing other people's vacation pictures suffered the most. They had thoughts like, "They have it so much better than me." So powerful is this default setting to compare to others that 1 in 3 people who visited Facebook felt worse about their lives after using it. It's not surprising then that researchers also found that the more time people spent on the site the more likely they were to have depression.

Now there's nothing wrong with Facebook. Facebook is fine. Facebook is simply bringing out the spiritual problems that people bring to the website. Problems that go way, way back to just after the fall. Way back then Cain compared himself to Abel and immediately self-destructed by murdering him. And so it shouldn't surprise us to find in ourselves tendencies to gauge our wellbeing through comparison to others. And I can tell you this: that never ends well. Why not? In basing our wellbeing on how we stack up to others, we ignore the fact that only God grants the wellbeing we crave. Anytime we leave God out of the equation it's idolatry. That leads to an ending that Jesus described in a story about a rich man who stared up into heaven wishing for the rest of eternity that he could experience what Lazarus had - God with all his peace and joy. Always craving, but never having.

Yes, the stakes are that high. We need to tie our wellbeing, our sense of blessedness to a different anchor. Not one that will drop us to an eternity of longing for God's peace, but one that will raise us to blessedness and blissfulness in eternity. A man hiding from his assassin in a dark cave is just the person to teach us about the wellbeing God grants. Here's his beautiful prayer: **"O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water."** In his circumstances, you'd think he'd pray about evading escape or beg God to calm his frayed nerves, but he doesn't. He knows he only needs one thing: God. It's funny how we (I'm talking about humanity in general now) don't get that until everything else fades away. David lost his

career. He lost his home. He even lost his safety. Everything was stripped away and it brought David to an incredible and true idea. "I only need you, God. My soul needs you. My body needs you. I need you, God, so badly that I'm like this wretched dried out, barren Judean desert without you."

That's a great truth that David is sharing with us. It's one that God brings all Christians to one way or another. One of the great church fathers was a man by the name of Augustine. Augustine forced God to bring him to that truth the hard way. He tried all the wrong ways to find a sense of wellbeing, to be happy, and to feel blessed. It was so bad that he even wrote a book about it called *Confessions*. Here's what God finally was able to teach him: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." Augustine and David both came to the same conclusion. Nothing and nobody can give a human soul a sense of blessedness. That's God's job. Only he can pull it off.

And here's the best part according to David. You have personal access to him. "**I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.**" Notice what David says. He says, "I have seen you." It's something he got to experience. It was intensely personal. He had seen God. And not just some lame, manmade god. In the sanctuary, he had seen the true God in all his power and glory. The real deal. That sight totally satisfied him and gave his soul peace. He had seen God.

But not like you might expect. You might be thinking, "Wow, God showed himself to David. That must've been amazing... it must've been all bright and all light. He must've experienced pure bliss in his presence." But this wasn't a physical vision. Remember David is off in a cave with his assassin around the corner. So how had he seen God? The same way you do. David sat in some dark cave and he believed. He believed that God exists. He believed that God was powerful. He believed that God was glorious and mighty. And he believed that God cared about him while he was in some cave in some dry desert while a massive manhunt was on for him. David believed and that's why he could write what amounts to a love poem for God: "**Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.**"

This is now my last sermon that I get to preach to you as your pastor. I've been thinking long and hard about what I might say in this sermon and how I might say it. I have memories that race through my head of my time at Trinity and the life we've shared while I've been here. The basketball games, the weddings, the funerals, the baptisms, the counseling, the joking, the snow storms... all of it. But in my last sermon that I get to preach as your pastor, I don't want to talk about any of that. I want to talk about someone who has given you personal access to God by his blood. I want to talk about someone who bought you a love that's better than life. I want to talk about someone whose business it is to satisfy souls so that they feel like your stomach might about 3pm on Thanksgiving Day. I want to talk about Jesus.

I want nothing more and nothing less than that you know him. I want you to believe and even experience for a moment the bliss that comes from knowing that Jesus loves you when your sin is black as night and your life is an awful mess. I want you to know the power of faith when tragedy strikes and God seems so far away. I want you to know that you can trust him when the chips are down. I want you to know that the remedy for a broken soul and a hurting body is God - only God. I want you to know that you were made for him and that seeing him in his glory and power leads to a feast for the soul and a song on the lips.

I think you know this already, but that's why I'm going to South Carolina. As much as I'll miss each one of you, I want people who haven't heard of or understood or experienced the comfort of God and the love of his Son to know it and believe in it. I want people in South Carolina to know what you know right now. I want them to believe in the same truths that you believe. With God's help I want to create a lighthouse of truth in a fast growing city that doesn't have one. It's a mission God has put on my heart in a big way. I talked to my first prospect in Aiken on Monday. He thinks he might have cancer. He hasn't attended a church since the age of 13. He said to me, "I'm scared. I'm so scared I feel psychotic." I listened to him and just loved him. As I did I told myself, "*He* is why I'm going to South Carolina."

And that brings me to the last thought I want to share with you - the last thing that I will share in my preaching ministry to you. Right now we have this truth and we hold to it by faith, but some day that will all change. You will see God with your own two eyes. It's not just a nice idea that I've been preaching to you over the past years that Jesus has reconciled you to God by his blood. It's real. And, therefore, it's also not just happy talk to say that you will enter his holy and powerful presence. And then it will happen. Everything will melt away. You will see God. You will see him as he is. You will experience his light and his bliss and radiance. And forever your heart will dance in unbroken streams of joy. That's wellbeing. That's being blessed. And you have it all in Jesus. Amen.