



Sunday, September 8, 2024

Kick-Off Sunday!

“From Generation to Generation” | Psalm 90 | Charlie Berthoud

In honor of Covenant’s 70th anniversary, I thought I’d find some inspiration with the number 70 in the Bible. It shows up in some interesting ways.

- In Exodus 24, Moses and 70 elders are confirming the covenant with God.
- In Numbers 11, God tells Moses to bring 70 elders, to receive the Spirit and share the workload.
- In Jeremiah 29, we read about 70 years of exile, just before hearing about a future with hope.
- In Luke 10, Jesus sends out 70 disciples, because the harvest is plentiful, and the workers are few.

Interestingly each of those references has to do with the passage of time or the work of the people.

And according to a tally from Bible study.org, there are 70 parables of Jesus in the Bible.

Each of those mentions of 70 is intriguing in its own way, but most intriguing to me is the 70 reference in Psalm 90.

When my dad died at age 72 back in 1995, our pastor chose Psalm 90 as one of the readings. The psalm suggests that a good life is 70 or 80 years, that our time is limited—and this may be why it was chosen.

“The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.”

But there is more to this psalm than a passing reference to 70 years, and it's not just a psalm for funerals.

What I hear in Psalm 90 is an invitation to wake up and realize that life is short, and so in that time—whatever time we have—to live with purpose and intention. It's a psalm to help us on the journey of faith.

Interestingly, Psalm 90 is the only one of the 150 Psalms that is attributed to Moses. And Moses is best known for leading the people of God on a long journey out of slavery and oppression, through the wilderness, toward the Promised Land.

The psalm begins with the realization of time, “from everlasting to everlasting,” or from “generation to generation” as some translations put it.

And in the time from generation to generation, God is our home. There is no mention of a building, a temple, a sanctuary. God is our, our foundation, our dwelling place, our home.

In verse 2, the language of being brought forth and being formed evokes childbirth, suggesting that God birthed creation.

Later we hear the phrase “satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love” which reminds us of the manna that God provided every morning for the people on the journey to promised land.

And it's important to note that “steadfast love” is that wonderful Hebrew word *HESED*, which runs through the Hebrew Scriptures. This is God's covenant love, God's ever-faithful love, the love that will never let us go.

If God provides this every morning, that's quite a “breakfast of champions.”

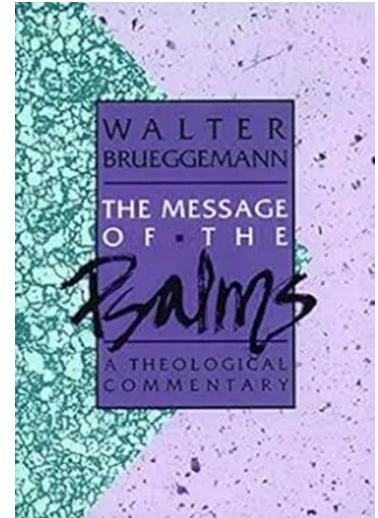
For me, there are two key phrases in Psalm 90. One comes in verse 12, which invites us to make good use of whatever time we have,

“So, teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.”

And the second key verse is the final verse, which asks God to work through us, to make us useful and productive: “prosper the work of our hands.”

In his delightful commentary *The Message of the Psalms*, Walter Brueggemann suggests that Psalm 90 is Moses’ prayer on the edge of the Promised Land, and the goal is wisdom, but specifically wisdom of living faithfully. He writes:

“Obviously a wise heart does not refer to knowledge, skill, technique, or the capacity to control. Instead, it seems to mean the capacity to submit, relinquish, and acknowledge the decisive impingement of Yahweh on one’s life.”



It sounds to me like this is the wisdom of learning that God loves us and then living in a new way because of that love.

So, as we think about past generations that made Covenant Presbyterian Church what it is, and as we look to the future mindful of what we can do



for future generations, listen for God’s word in these excerpts from Psalm 90.

“Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night.

The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Let your work be manifest to your servants, and your glorious power to their children.

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands— O prosper the work of our hands!”

Happy 70th anniversary Covenant Presbyterian Church!

Seventy years is a long time! Some of you have been here for a long time. Let's see who has been here for a while....

If you've been part of the Covenant community for more than 10 years, please raise your hand. How about 15? 20? 30? 40? 50? 60?

And is there anyone here today for the very first time?

No matter how long you've been here, right now you're sitting in a place where some wonderful and faithful people have sat. The sanctuary was dedicated in 1968--56 years ago!

For 70 years, the people of Covenant have been gathering for worship, to do Bible study, go to committee meetings, have Sunday school, build Habitat for Humanity homes, make beautiful music, go on mission trips to Guatemala and Washington DC. Covenant people have gathered together to laugh and cry with each other, to comfort each other in hard times, to eat chili and drink coffee, and to try to figure out what being a Christian is all about.

You are part of a church with a long history of wonderful and faithful people seeking God's will, trying to live with resurrection hope and to make the world a better place. In our 70 years we've tried to work with a variety of partners in our common task of Kingdom building and making this world better. I asked a few friends and partners of Covenant to share their thoughts. [video]

Sarah GG—principal of Glenn Stephen's Elementary
Healthy snacks, penpals, school supplies, playground equipment

Just this summer, funding for shelves

Alex Gee—Fountain of Life Church and Project Nehemiah
Black History for a New Day. Long supported by Covenant
Pastor Emeritus Bill King was very involved early on

Betsey Moe—Guatemala
Build homes, supported education, provided scholarships
Built bridges of understanding

Scott Anderson—first openly gay pastor ordained in PCUSA, here at Covenant
Friend and colleague to me and many others

These videos represent just a small sample of how, over the years, this church has changed countless lives as we learn about the love of God and then live new lives, lives of purpose and compassion and justice and goodness.

We could have had a hundred other videos, with people expressing their gratitude. But today is not only about celebrating our past, and it is certainly not about just patting ourselves on the back.

Psalm 90 invites us to recognize that time moves on, from generation to generation, and as time moves on, “from once upon a time til thy Kingdom come,” as *The Message* puts it) we need to find our place in it and how we can keep moving forward on the journey.

In whatever time we have, how can our hands and hearts and minds and lives be used for good? How can we continue on the journey with each other and with God? How can we make our relationships and community better? How can we make this church better?

What kind of legacy are we leaving for future generations?

Making good use of the time is central to the message of Jesus, as we hear right in the beginning of his ministry.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God ¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has

come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

As we read in the first chapter of Mark’s gospel, Jesus said that a new time is upon us, that God’s Kingdom time had begun. This new kingdom is good news and it requires a change in direction for the journey.

¹⁶ As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him

Then he invited those two fishermen to follow him and to “fish for people” which seems like finding new purpose, and it seems like a prelude to Jesus’ commandment “love your neighbor.”

So today as we celebrate the past, we look into the future, asking God to give us renewed purpose, as followers of Jesus, knowing that our individual time is finite. I want to close by sharing part of a beloved Mary Oliver poem, called “The Summer Day.” Most of the poem is focused on the beauty of creation and a grasshopper, and then it ends with two questions, which remind me of Psalm 90, recognizing that time is limited and that we can make good use of that time.

These questions could be for us individually, and for us as a church:

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

Let us pray:

*Thank you God for the gift of life
Thank you for the gift of your love for us and for the world
Grant us wisdom and grant us courage as we seek to follow in the way of Jesus
Help us live with a sense of purpose. This very day, help us to make your love known
With our words and our deeds.
Thank you for giving us companions on the journey, and thank you God for always
being with us, on the journey today and forever.*