

Book 1: Psalms 1-41

Foreshadowing Christ — Psalms 1-2



Nelly Bube

This first Psalm calls us to be godly people, immersed in God's word, becoming like a fruitful tree. Christ also compared a godly person to a fruitful tree. But several early church fathers said Christ is the most perfect example of the one described in

the first Psalm, the most godly one, the living and fruitful tree. Looking at the tree as Christ, we who believe are the fruit he has brought forth.

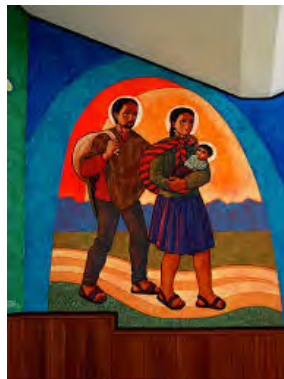
While Christ is present implicitly as the fruitful tree in Psalm 1, the New Testament writers made his presence in Psalm 2 explicit. Acts 4:25-26 quoted the first two verses about opposition and anger against the Messiah and then explained: “In fact, this has happened here in this very city! For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed.”

That referred to Christ’s crucifixion, but the earlier King Herod had also been part of that angry opposition by mortal rulers at the time of Christ’s birth. When the wise men came and inquired about a newborn King of the Jews, he sent soldiers to kill all the babies in Bethlehem, expecting to eliminate this threat. But Herod, a politician desperate to hold on to his own power, was no match for this seemingly helpless infant.

The final line of the Psalm is a celebration of living with Christ as king: “What joy for all who find protection in him!” We celebrate the joy of his coming, his kingship over all the earth, and creation celebrating him.

Do I see that he is the living tree? Am I internalizing God’s word to be a fruitful tree like him? Do I recognize him as the King of kings?

Lament — Psalms 3-7



Sagrada Familia, Maximino Cerezo Barredo

Suffering is always present in the world, and the Psalms acknowledge this. They are not cold analytical prayers, but are full of emotion: longing, sadness, anxiety, anger, hope, wonder, and the whole range of human reality. We know that when Christ grew and began his ministry, he demonstrated to us his full humanity

by experiencing and expressing all these emotions. His example and that of the Psalms assure us we can be completely real before God.

Before his passion, Christ expressed the anguish of his heart in prayer in the garden to the point that he sweat drops of blood. He was facing fierce opposition from enemies, and his prayer expressed the two sides of a lament: “let this cup pass from me” and “not my will but yours.”

Psalmists expressed anguish in laments, and there are more poems of this genre than any other, over a third of the Psalter. We see the pattern of expressing distress, but also of expressing hope and confidence that God will rescue. Some sources of distress include enemies or pursuers, a general depression and absence of well-being, evil or arrogant people, or physical suffering. All of these we experience, and all of these Christ experienced.

The Psalms teach us that honest cries of the needs of our hearts make good prayers. At the same time they challenge us to return to hope in God. The Psalmist’s heart includes confidence that God will deliver him from enemies, will give him renewed joy and peace, will rescue him from death, will provide refuge, justice, and appropriate judgment for those perpetrating violence. From this example we learn to express hope and faith along with the depths of our need and fear.

Whatever causes us to be sick at heart, it comforts us to know that Christ shares the anguish. The reassurance that God cares about our heartbreaks and responds to our cries for help increases the longer we follow him. That God became man and knows how difficult life is for us is the great mystery of our faith, the great assurance that we are completely understood by the Incarnated God.

Do I really believe it is alright to feel every aspect of my emotional world fully? Do I believe that God is with me in these feelings?

Incarnation — Psalms 8-11



A multitude of angels, Joan Bohlig

According to the writer of Hebrews, Christ's incarnation was prophesied in Psalm 8. The writer of Hebrews didn't look up the reference but wrote, "somewhere in the Scripture it says..." which is a delightful reminder that scripture writers did not necessarily footnote. Hebrews recognizes that the only one of whom it can truly be said that all things are under his feet is Christ. (Hebrews 2:5-9)

Because of the incarnation, he too, was made a little lower than the angels, but has now been crowned with glory and honor. Christ was literally lower than the angels as they announced his birth to the shepherds as he lay in a manger. His death was something angels do not experience. His resurrection, ascension, and his ascent to the Father's right hand raised him higher than the angels once more, ruler over all creation.

Praise for God is the second most dominant genre in the Psalms which not only call us to praise, but give us reasons to do so. In this poem, we are called to praise God for his creation. The prophetic allusion to incarnation unites the great mystery that the creator became a humble child within his creation.

Because he became a human being, he understands from the inside the complexity of our lives. He knew sorrow and suffering, and he knew that griefs turn to joy. Psalmists knew this as well, and poems of lament are balanced with poems of

thanksgiving. Psalms 9-10 go together as one acrostic poem built on the Hebrew alphabet. The first is full of thanksgiving for prayers that have been answered. The second is a cry for help. The reality is that our lives alternate between thanksgiving and lament. The poem ends with confidence in an eternal king who defends the oppressed, a king we know to be Christ.

In Psalm 11 the distress of lament has been answered, and once more there is joy and peace and hope. In this Psalm are three recurring themes for praise: the king, his enthronement, and Jerusalem. We see that these apply specifically to Christ as the eternal king who was enthroned over all nations in his ascension, and whose city is the site of his presence and great victory. His incarnation never took away his divinity.

I am glad that the Psalms validate thanksgiving and lament and grief becoming joy since I alternate between all of these things. Even in my times of lament and grief I am comforted to know that Christ became man and understands me.

Am I full of wonder that Christ as a child was literally lower than the singing angels who announced his birth?

Our Sin — Psalms 12-15, Romans 3:23



Abyss, Sandra Bowden

In the nativity narrative, Zechariah spoke prophetically and said that “You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins.” (Luke 1:77) Even though Christ had not yet been born, his work of salvation from sin was already being proclaimed.

Christ’s work on the cross removed all that is evil, the vile things that people honor. The Psalmist complains of the wickedness of others and the need for God to arise and do something about it, the need for something to be done about his daily sorrow, and for salvation to come from Jerusalem. Christ fulfilled these cries for him and for us.

Universal sin and a universal need for repentance and new birth are presented in Psalm 14:2-3. Paul quoted this in Romans 3 as evidence that all, Jews and Gentiles, need salvation. He chained together additional Psalms to build his case that all mankind needed redemption. After concluding that all have sinned, Paul gave the hopeful transformation of this problem in Christ. This Psalm is repeated with only a small variation in Psalm 53. The message is important and reinforced by the repetition: man’s sin is a serious problem and a cry for salvation to come out of Zion was answered in Christ.

The Psalmists repeatedly asked God to declare them innocent while simultaneously acknowledging that no one is innocent before God. We see the solution to this paradox in the gospel: innocence is declared through Christ’s work. We know that Christ identified himself with the temple, and a series of temple-themed poems such as Psalm 15 insist that it is only the pure who can join God in his temple. We now understand that it was Christ’s purity that opened the way for us to become pure enough to become his temple now.

Christ’s ability to do this was repeatedly foreshadowed in stories and prophecies, but it was not until after his death and resurrection that even those closest to him recognized the possibility. For us, we take this good news a little for granted, it has become so familiar. But how wonderful that even though we are ashamed and guilty people, God declares us innocent because of the cross. Our sin, shame and guilt have a complete solution, and we can rejoice. In the face of my own failures, past and present, this is good news.

Have I confessed my sins and rejoiced in being declared innocent before God?

Preaching Christ — Psalms 16-18, Acts 2:24-28



Cross, Sandra Bowden

According to the Apostle Peter, Psalm 16 contains a clear prophecy of resurrection. He quoted it in his Pentecost sermon. Peter applied the promise that God would not leave his holy one to rot in the grave to Christ, saying that David was a prophet and knew that one of his descendants would sit on his throne and be resurrected.

Psalm 17 evokes the image of a mother bird protecting her young, an image Christ used regarding his desire to protect his people in Jerusalem. The Psalmist expresses confidence that God will protect him from his enemies, and we see

something that points to our resurrection and Christ's resurrection in the phrase that we will see God when we awake.

Psalms 18 is a repetition of II Samuel 22. In verses 4-7 we can see the crucifixion, Christ's prayers on the cross, and the earthquake at the time of Christ's death. In verse 9 we see a hint of the incarnation in the phrase that "he parted the heavens and came down." In verses 16-20 we see indications of the resurrection, and the reminder that God's voice from heaven spoke of his delight in Christ at both baptism and transfiguration. Verses 39-43 celebrate his victory over enemies, and his rulership over nations.

God's military victories through David are transfigured by Paul who uses a quote from Psalm 18 in his argument that the gospel is for the Gentiles. Paul moves from David's context of God paying back those who harm him to good news that nations are welcomed into God's community, quoting verse 49 in Romans 15:9. Paul gives us a post-resurrection reinterpretation of the relationship of the people of God to non-believers.

The gospel is in the Psalms: Messiah has been resurrected and he loves the whole world. As we celebrate his coming to earth to carry out this great work of redemption for all people, we are reminded that this message was hidden, almost like a code, in these poems of worship. Now that Christ has come, we can read the code, and be grateful for what he has done.

The apostles help us see that Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection were foreshadowed in scripture. Am I comfortable connecting the Old and the New as they did?

Victory--Psalms 19-21



Nativity after Bellini/Altarpiece VIII, Sandra Bowden

These three Psalms of praise can all be applied to Christ. Psalm 19 celebrates him as our creator, the word, the rock, and our redeemer. Psalms 20 and 21 take up the theme of kingship, celebrating the victory of the anointed king and that the eternal king is a just judge. Resurrection and eternal life are predicted when the Psalmist says that the days of life will stretch on forever.

Variations on the word *victory* are repeated five times. I like the optimism of Psalm 21 that asks that God will grant our heart's desires, make all our plans succeed, so

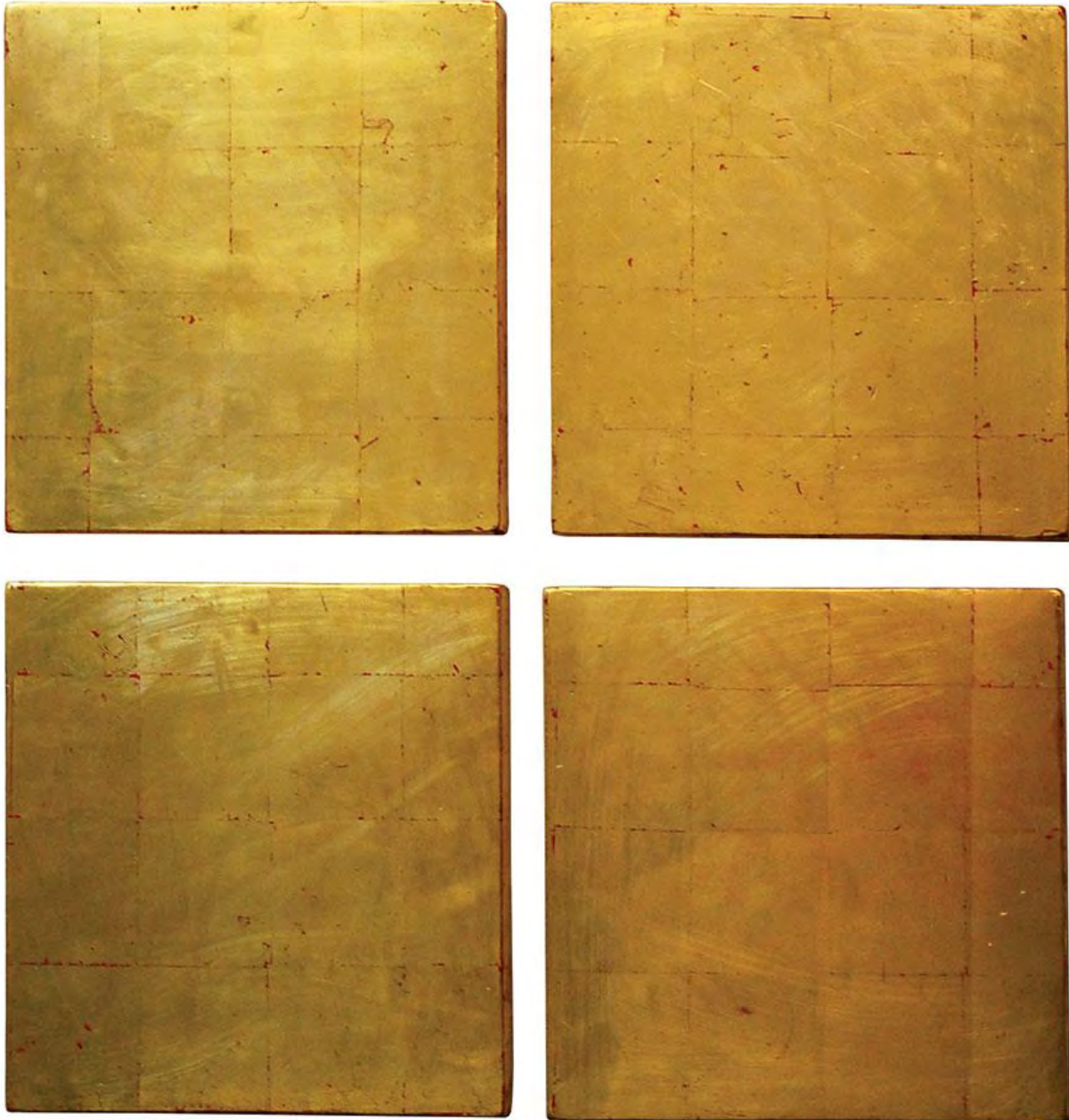
that we can shout for joy over this victory. In Psalm 21 I like the sound of victory shouts from the king for success and prosperity. In many Psalms where there is a struggle with enemies, we can see Christ's struggle with spiritual and temporal forces arrayed against him, so when his life is preserved (cf. verse 4) we see an intimation of the resurrection, the ultimate form of victory.

What I struggle with, of course, is the time between requests for victory and their fulfillment. Victory delayed often feels like victory denied. The Psalms remind us that victory is possible, victory is coming, and no prayer is forgotten. This helps us to keep expecting something good even when we cannot see it.

We look back to Christ's victory over sin and death. We look forward to the ultimate victory. But meanwhile, as Paul tells us, we have been given victory. As John tells us in his first letter, we have won victory because the Spirit in us is greater than the spirit in the world, and our victory comes through faith.

Do I see that Christ brought victory over death and destruction for all who respond to him? Am I living with a consciousness of these victories?

Christ's Lament—Psalm 22, Matthew 24:36



Gold Cross I, Sandra Bowden

On the cross Christ cried out the heart-wrenching first line of this Psalm. The sense of God's abandonment in suffering is something we can identify with, and it strengthens us to know Christ experienced that. At the same time, it puts this cry into a larger context to realize it is the beginning of a lament which alternates between complaint and trust.

Surely Christ knew the whole song. The heading tells us the tune was "Doe of the Dawn" which sounds plaintive and poignant. Perhaps he recited the whole song in

his mind during the crucifixion. It provides a pattern for how to pray in our own struggles.

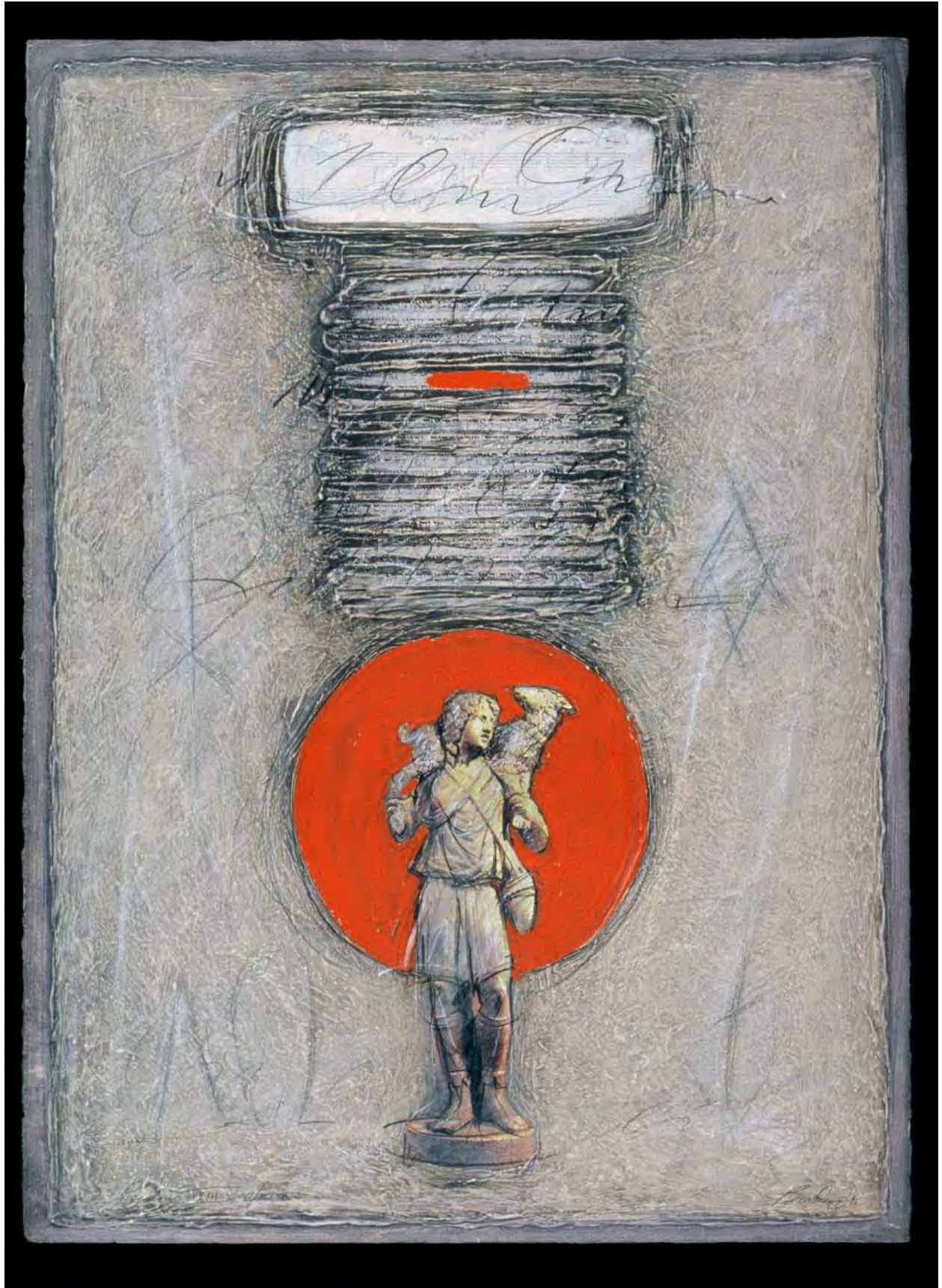
After the cry of despair, the Psalm turns to recalling God's past actions as a source of encouragement. There is once more a complaint over being mocked, and the words are much like what bystanders scoffed and shouted at Christ on the cross. The following complaint describes the physical suffering of the crucifixion in graphic detail and ends with the prophetic word cited in the gospels about throwing dice for his clothing. The following petition is for his life to be spared, something fulfilled in the resurrection.

In the middle of these crucifixion prophecies there is a beautiful reference to Christ's birth and infancy: "Yet you brought me safely from my mother's womb and led me to trust you when I was a nursing infant. I was thrust upon you at my birth. You have been my God from the moment I was born."(verses 9-10)

The rest of the Psalm is praise, and the vow to proclaim God's name to his brothers and sisters is quoted in Hebrews as what Christ does for us. The final lines of praise celebrate that all the earth will acknowledge God and bow before him, and that those not yet born will hear about all he has done. It is deeply touching to me to think that on the cross Christ was praying this, thinking of those of us generations in the future who would come to believe in him.

Does it encourage me to know that Christ knew this Psalm described far more than his suffering and abandonment?

Shepherd, King, The Way — Psalms 23-25, John 10:11-14



Shepherd's Psalm, Sandra Bowden

Christ called himself the Good Shepherd and in well-loved Psalm 23 we see details of what that means. Books have been written to help us truly grasp what a loving image this is that he cares for us as his sheep. Psalm 24 celebrates the return of the king; the moment he entered the gates of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as well as looking ahead to his re-entry at the end of time. Psalm 25 returns repeatedly to asking God to show his path or way, and Christ told us that he is the way.

Each of these metaphors is one of protection and guidance. When I feel lost or uncertain, it is a comfort to read any one of these Psalms and allow them to speak deeply into my heart for current needs. I can remember a moment in my life when I felt lost and confused, and a friend offered a book meditating on Psalm 23 that repeatedly reminded me that even if I did not know the way to go, the shepherd did, and could be trusted. Despite my anxiety, at an even deeper level I knew this must be true, based on years of walking in faith and finding God to be faithful. Every part of the Psalm seemed to come true in my life, and I can attest that God's goodness and unfailing mercy have followed me, and I look forward to the future eternal home with God.

There is similar comfort in knowing that the mighty king who is celebrated as he enters the city has made me part of his royal family. The Holy Spirit who is ever present as a guide on the way to go is a great comfort as well. These images of Christ comfort me in my insecurity.

Do I respond to God as a shepherd who leads me on the way? Do I respond to God as a mighty and glorious king? Do I follow him as my God.

Metaphors for Christ — Psalm 26-30



God created, Sandra Bowden

Christ took themes from Psalms and developed them in his own teaching. He used metaphors for God found in these prayers and applied them to himself—light, rock, shepherd, teacher, guide, helper, father, king, and judge. Interestingly he did not use imagery of God as warrior, or metaphors for God that are tools of war—shield, horn, fortress, and high tower.

In each of these Psalms we see at least one thing that Christ later applied to himself or his kingdom: the temple in Psalm 26; light in Psalm 27; a shepherd carrying his sheep in Psalm 28; being worshipped by angels in Psalm 29; and being raised from the dead in Psalm 30. The first three of these Psalms are laments, followed by a song of praise and one of thanksgiving.

Over and over we see characteristics of Christ in these Psalms. In Psalm 26:1 the Psalmist declares his innocence, but we know Christ is the only one who is truly

innocent. In verse 4 he rejects hypocrisy, and Christ's harshest rhetoric was for this sin. In verse 8 he speaks of loving the sanctuary, something we see in Christ's life. In Psalm 27:3 the lack of fear of enemies who accuse him falsely (v. 12) and being vindicated in life (v. 13) characterize Christ. All the conflicts with enemies throughout the Psalms can apply to us, but they most clearly apply to him. But in 28:8 there is victory for the anointed king. In 29:1 angels honor him, he urges us to make God's name holy as Christ did in his prayer (vs. 2).

Many Psalms celebrate the beauty of creation, but Psalm 27:4 expresses a desire to gaze on God's beauty. Simone Weil helps us apply this: "The beauty of the world is the tender smile of Christ to us through matter. He is really present in universal beauty." And "The desire to love the beauty of the world in a human being is essentially the desire for the Incarnation."

Christ's own teachings were beautiful stories and metaphors, and this way of thinking helps us to interpret the ancient texts of the Hebrew scriptures in a way that is profitable and touches our hearts. We do not want to treat the scriptures as merely an encyclopedia, or as a rule book, but to take it on its own terms as literature with profoundly symbolic and beautiful meanings. We can worship at what some have called "the altar of the world" when we connect what is around us with Christ.

Do I delight in the beauty of the incarnation seen through our world?

God's care — Psalms 31-35



Flight into Egypt, Joan Bohlig

A recurring theme in the Psalms is that God intimately cares about each one of us and meets our needs as individuals and as a community. Christ expressed his deep love for his followers and promised they would have his presence with them through the Holy Spirit. Many Psalms are personal expressions of emotional connection.

Christ protects us, and the Psalmist celebrates protection in Psalm 31. Psalm 32 is a well-known song of praise for forgiveness. Psalms 33 and 34 are simply cheerful. David affirmed that while we have many troubles, God rescues us from each one. In Psalm 35 there is a prayer for processing things when friends have been treating one badly, but it ends with joy, praise for God's greatness, and testimony of God's justice and goodness. Verse 19 is applied to Christ in John 1:25, saying he was hated without cause.

Psalm 31 had significance for me when I read it as a college freshman. I had always felt protected and secure, so the idea of experiencing anguish of soul, grief, tears, scorn, being ignored, having rumors circulate about me, conspiring enemies, the possibility of disgrace, accusations, and my city under attack all sounded awful. Surely this could not be right, and God's obedient children would be blessed instead.

Years later I remembered this Psalm when difficult things befell me, but then the promises stood out in sharper relief: God would see to it I was not put to shame, he would be a rock of safety, he would lead me out of danger, he cared about the anguish of my soul, he hid me in the shelter of his presence, he blessed me before the watching world, and I was able to put my future in his hands. I was comforted and amazed that this was true.

Christ knew all of this at a much deeper level which gave him dignity in the undeserved mockery and suffering to which he was subjected. Even as an infant, his life was in such danger from a wicked king that his family fled the country and lived as refugees in Egypt. For all of us, he shows the way to live with complete security in the face of opposition.

Do I honestly believe God cares for me when I am in the middle of a bad situation?

Meekness — Psalms 36-37



The Promise, Sarah Bowden

Christ called for a humble, meek heart in the Beatitudes, quoting Psalm 37:11. There is much to tempt us away from that meekness. In both Psalms the author complains of wicked people, but ends by affirming his faith and asking that the wicked will not move him away from the solidity of faith. He tells himself to be calm and not worry or be envious of those who do wrong.

Meekness can be defined as humility toward God and others, and one demonstration of it is to “Be still in the presence of the Lord, and wait patiently for him to act. Don’t worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes.” (Psalm 37:7)

A pastor told me that waiting on God was just waiting, like waiting in line or in a doctor’s office—just waiting to see what God would do. This was a, to me, shocking alternative to bustling about and trying to fix things myself. This way of waiting is an act of trust in God’s goodness, and the peace and hope it brings are a healthy way of living. God has promised he will take care of those not obeying him, that is not my business.

Our culture values asserting ourselves to the point of aggressiveness, and values self-promotion. These are anti-Christian values that need to be cut out of our hearts. Christ exemplified meekness in his entire ministry, but particularly as he suffered and died. Christ told us the meek will inherit the earth and he showed us this is so. He received the rewards of his meekness in his resurrection and ascension: rulership of the entire earth. The promises and repeated fulfillments of deliverance throughout scripture culminated in him.

There is great comfort in the promises that as we delight in God, he gives us our heart's desires (37:4) and that the steps of the godly are directed by him, and he delights in each detail of our lives. (37:23). Knowing these promises helps us wait peacefully, hopefully, and patiently for the answers to our prayers.

Am I committed to living with the counter-cultural value of meekness, full of faith that this is the right approach to difficulties and conflicts?

Healing — Psalms 38-41



Resurrection of Lazarus, Henry Ossawa Tanner

Healing people was the predominant activity of Christ's ministry, and Psalms return repeatedly to faith in God's promise to heal. There are many positive affirmations, but the Psalmist also does not hesitate to complain about bad health. David knows, however, that relationship with God is more important than health and affirms that even if health fails, God is still the strength of his life.

There are 31 healing stories in the Gospels. In the scriptures, some variant of the word healing is used 252 times, with almost half of the occurrences in the Gospels (124), showing how central this was in Christ's life.

Psalm 38 is a penitential lament. If our own sins are the cause of our distress, what is needed is confession and repentance. Our sins have bad effects on our health, and our repentance is part of seeking our healing. These Psalms model that confessional process for us. Psalms 38 and 39 reinforce that it can be the sins of others that cause illness and distress. I appreciate the balanced approach that recognizes that God is both with us in illness, and can also restore our health, even calling God a nurse in Psalm 41. We also have an example of fasting for the health of another.

The New Testament tells us that Christ carries our sins in his body on the cross and it is by his wounds we are healed. (I Peter 2:24) The exegesis in Hebrews 10:3-10 of Psalm 40 shows that Christ is the final and complete sacrifice for sin. The Greek Old Testament is quoted and makes the incarnation explicit: "But you have given me a body to offer."

We need these principles in facing our own illnesses or those of others: the cross is the source of our healing, we can confess sins that create health problems, my relationship with God is more important than my health, he is present with me no matter what I am going through, and miraculous healing is real. All are part of our prayers. Through the years the most important thing I have learned about healing is that Christ identifies with the one who is ill. "I was sick and you cared for me", he said. This is our most important duty toward those who are ill: to recognize Christ in them and to offer reverent care. The only ones Christ ever scolded for not having enough faith for healing were the ones who were doing the praying; the patient never deserves that from any of us.

Do I believe in God's ability to heal? Is there someone I can pray for?

Book 2: Psalms 42-72

Longing for God—Psalms 42-43



Roe Deer at a Stream, Gustave Courbet

Seeing the sin and suffering of the world can provoke us to hunger and thirst for righteousness, and Christ said we will be blessed for this. The Psalmist expresses his thirst, comparing himself to a deer in desperate need, saying he is thirsting for God.

Four times in these two Psalms he repeats that he feels downcast and disturbed, and yet each time he has a solution to his angst: put hope in God and praise will come. This is a practical spiritual lesson for our times of anxiety or yearning for something to happen.

Christ's greatest expression of this kind of agony and desire for action to change a situation comes through in the story of his prayer in the garden. He is in such grief and pain that he sweats great drops of blood. Perhaps his example assures us that our moments of great distress are accepted, understood and identified with. It is a great comfort that Paul told us that the Spirit is praying with and for us when our groans are beyond words.

Temporarily we may not get what we are asking for, just as Christ did not get rescued from having to go through the pain and suffering of the cross. But in the long run he did get his deepest desire, and we do also. Our very deepest longing is for God and his presence which is available even when we must accept "not my will."

Does my heart long for God no matter what my circumstances or emotions might be?

Christ the King — Psalms 44-48



Reflections/Altarpiece II, Sandra Bowden

The central theme of Christ's preaching was the Kingdom of God, and the Psalms repeatedly referred to God as king. "Kingdom" occurs 158 times in the New Testament, and 123 of those instances are in the Gospels.

In Psalm 44 he refers to his king and God who gives victory, and despite current defeats, there is hope for intervention. Being led like sheep to slaughter is repeated twice, and the taunts of the mockers remind us of him. Psalm 45:6,7 is quoted in Hebrews 1 and applied to Christ. His eternal throne, royal power, justice, love for the right, hate for wrong, anointing and joy described in these verses is supplemented by references to his gracious words, defence of humility, nations falling before him, etc. As an earthly king marries his beautiful bride, it is not too difficult to transfer this symbolically to the marriage of Christ and the church.

In Psalm 46 we have references to earthquakes, mountains falling in the sea, the end of war, and a river in God's City—all reminiscent of end-times imagery in Revelation. Praise for Zion reminds us that Christ the King accomplished his greatest work of salvation on the cross and resurrection in Jerusalem. This makes it the most praiseworthy city of all, and a foretaste of the perfect city at the end of time when all people will bow to the King of Kings. In the fulfillment of his kingdom all wars will cease, something to which we still must look forward in our chaotic times.

The rule of God as King of Kings and Lord of Lords is prefigured in Psalm 47, even the trumpets blaring. This Psalm is sung to celebrate the ascension since verse 5 speaks of God ascending, and reading it with that knowledge helps me see its prophetic appropriateness. Psalm 48 celebrates God as great and celebrates Zion as the city of the great king, but it also mentions being ransomed from death, a hint of resurrection (vs. 8,9).

Understandably, when Christ came, people expected kingly prophecies to be fulfilled by Messiah, and were puzzled when he rejected becoming the leader of a revolutionary movement to overthrow Roman domination. Between his resurrection and ascension Christ taught them about the Kingdom of God, but even then they wondered if literal freedom for Israel was at hand. He explained that when things will be complete is known only to God, but they could announce that Christ had come and so preach the kingdom. Today, we have the same charge.

Am I telling others the good news that Christ reigns?

The Gospel — Psalm 49-51



Resurrection Book, Sandra Bowden

In the middle of a Proverb-like poem, Psalm 49, which gives us a wise perspective on wealth, we are told that we cannot redeem ourselves from death. We are not able to pay a ransom to God, because no one could ever pay enough to escape death. For a Christian, one cannot help but think “but Christ did pay that ransom and redeem us from death.” No matter how difficult, we now know that there was one able to “pay enough” for us to live forever. Then comes a prophetic hint of resurrection in verse 15 when David says God will redeem his life and snatch him from the power of the grave, something that only came through Christ.

Psalm 50 presents the truth that the covenant with God is through sacrifice, yet critiques the rituals of animal sacrifices. He calls for a sacrifice of thanksgiving, which is what replaces animal sacrifice because of Christ. This Psalm seems to prophecy that replacement, coming down firmly on the side of thanksgiving as the needed response.

Because of Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection, we know we have forgiveness of sins if we but ask. David committed adultery and murdered a friend. When confronted by the prophet Nathan, he confessed his sin and repented. Psalm 51 is that deep cry of repentance that knows that forgiveness comes only from God’s grace. We have nothing to justify ourselves; it is God himself who does this.

Our redemption, our resurrection, and our forgiveness are because of Christ’s work and love. Thanksgiving and praise are the right response. This gracious promise of Messiah as Savior is in the prophetic songs of Mary and Zechariah, of the angels and of Simeon. The good news of repentance and the forgiveness of sins is how

Christ began his ministry. He ended it by enacting what all of those animal sacrifices had prefigured. We have a chance to live it.

Am I living with a conscious gratitude for God's forgiving grace?

Conformed to Christ — Psalms 52-59



It is finished, Sandra Bowden

These Psalms present Christ's unjust suffering and his resurrection which made our forgiveness possible. These Psalms emerged from experiences in David's life according to their titles, yet his suffering and rescue were part of a prophetic life pattern that would be fulfilled in Christ. The pattern of David's life foreshadowed Christ's life.

Betrayal and judgement: (52:1,5) Doeg's betrayal to Saul.

Universal sin: David's meditation. The text declaring this is repeated in the New Testament to explain the need for the good news. (53:1-3, Romans 3:12)

Enemies calling for death: (54:3) Betrayed by Ziphites to Saul.

Betrayal by a friend: (55:12-14, 20-21) David's song.

Resurrection: (56:13) When Philistines seized him in Gath.

Vindicated by God: (57:2) Fled from Saul into the cave.

Treated unjustly by rulers: (58:1,2) David's song.

Innocent yet verbally condemned: (59:4,7) Saul's soldiers sent to his house.

David's life foreshadowed Christ in both sufferings and victory. We have a choice to see our own lives through this lens as well. If we experience struggle we can be glad to have the chance to suffer in Christ. If we have the joy of great victories that we can see as resurrections or as vindication we can delight in being conformed to his resurrection.

Am I willing to look at my suffering and the suffering of others as having transformative potential? Is my life being conformed to Christ in both suffering and victory?

Protection — Psalms 60-64



Ben Austrian

Christ desired to protect suffering people like a mother hen, but they would not let him. The Psalmist cries out in Psalm 61 for the shelter of God's wings, and in Psalm 63 he sings in gratitude in the shadow of the wings. Here the believing Psalmist does allow that sheltering presence of protection.

A portion of Psalm 60 will be combined with a few verses of Psalm 57 to form Psalm 108. Rather than the laments from which they are taken, the words of triumph are combined in a new way to emphasize that God is fighting on the people's behalf against every enemy. The enemies mentioned had harassed them for centuries, and in David's time he put an end to them as a threat. Once again, the emphasis is on God's role as protector.

The theme of God as a mother bird protecting her young occurs throughout scripture. Boaz' blessing on Ruth: "May the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge, reward you fully for what you have done." (Ruth 2:12) Elsewhere in the Psalms: "Guard me as you would guard your own eyes. Hide me in the shadow of your wings." (Psalm 17:8) and "How precious is your unfailing love, O God! All humanity finds shelter in the shadow of your wings." (Psalm 36:7) "He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings. His faithful promises are your armor and protection." (Psalm 91:4)

It is a tender image, one that reassures with its down-to-earth quality, the maternal connection, and a kind of miniaturization of God into a small creature who cares for

even smaller creatures. Christ himself used the image as he went toward his death in Jerusalem.

The remarkable thing, however, is that God chose to literally miniaturize himself into an infant child, making himself small and vulnerable as he identified with us. That is the deep wonder of Christmas, that the infinite creator became a small creature.

Do I feel the tenderness of God?

King of the Nations — Psalms 65-68



Golden Sea, Makoto Fujimura

Christ is presented to us as king of the nations in the New Testament, and in the Psalms we are told that the Lord is the king of all the earth, and that all kings belong to him. Ultimately, he will cause wars to cease and be honored throughout the earth. Those from the ends of the earth stand in awe of his wisdom. The nations will be glad because God governs with justice and directs the actions of the whole world. All nations will be blessed through him and give him praise, and the whole earth will be filled with his glory.

Psalm 67 celebrates that all the nations will praise God, and Christ's command to go into all the world with the gospel is a practical outworking of making that happen. Psalm 68 celebrated military victory and conquest, but was spiritualized in the New Testament. Paul used the quote as a reference to the ascension, spiritual liberation, and the giving of spiritual gifts. This precedent of using formerly physical warfare as an image of Christ's triumph over spiritual forces makes clear the transformative nature of Christ's coming to earth.

Focusing on Christ's ascension to the throne of God as King of all can transform our perspective on all the chaos in the world. He promises to come set it to right, he promises that ultimately peace will rule. In my personal life, returning to the

confidence in him as ruler of all takes away many fears and struggles, and returns me to peace.

Am I working for God's kingdom, not confusing it with earthly kingdoms, even my own much loved country? Do I see how his rulership over all things affects my own daily concerns?

Zeal for God's House — Psalms 69-72



Logos, Sandra Bowden

Christ's action in expelling merchants evokes a quote from Psalm 69. The disciples seemed to feel that since all of scripture was about Christ, applying it in this way was acceptable poetic license. The New Testament quotes the Psalm five times in reference to Christ, with additional references in all four gospel accounts regarding sour wine to satisfy thirst, a crucifixion event. After the ascension, Peter quoted the prediction of Judas' betrayal from this Psalm. While seemingly taken out of context, Peter identified prophecies of the Holy Spirit, speaking through David.

Using similar textual freedom, one can see references to insults and suffering in Psalms 70, 71, and 72 as applying to Christ as well as the Psalmist.

Psalm 70 repeats a portion of Psalm 40. One highlight is the request that those who love God will always say “The Lord is great!” At the end he pleads, “Lord, do not delay!” For anyone who has made prayer an important part of their life, these are two sides of a coin: confidence in God’s character and desiring answers more quickly than they seem to be coming. Living with this paradox is essential to our spiritual maturity.

In Psalm 71 there are references to trusting God from birth, living a miraculous life, being restored to life, lifted from the depths of earth, and restored to even greater honor. In Psalm 72 we look ahead to a king who defends and rescues the poor and needy, who has an everlasting kingdom, and whose glory fills the earth. All kings will bow to him. Christ is the only one who fulfills all these things perfectly.

Christ told his disciples that all the scriptures pointed to him, and in these Psalms we see that it is so. Prophecy and fulfillment increase our confidence in God’s word and the validity of our faith. As Christ himself read the Old Testament scriptures he doubtless always saw the deeper meanings that it has taken centuries of believing readers to grasp.

Do I see Christ clearly prophesied in the Old Testament?

Book 3: Psalms 73-89

Persistent Prayer — Psalms 73-74



Prayers of the people, Sandra Bowden

Christ commands us to not give up, and to make our requests to him persistently. Asaph, author of these Psalms, begs for action saying that he is pleading and praying all night long.

Asaph, author of Psalms 73-83, was a musician and Levite David appointed to lead worship. He seemed to have a Job-like philosophical bent. He worried about judgment on the wicked and how badly things were going for the nation and for him. Faith in a glorious and majestic God kept him persistent in his prayers saying until God acted, he was without joy, moaning, and longing for God's help.

Psalm 73 is a wisdom Psalm that struggles with the dissonance that the arrogant have a good life apart from God. Asaph suddenly realizes that, from an eternal perspective, things do not necessarily turn out so favorably for them, but rather do for those who believe. He apologizes for his bad attitude and refocuses, a good prayer model in our affluent, image-conscious age when we want the good life now.

Psalm 74 mourns the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the pain of exile. He says plaintively that no one knows how long this will last. The lament turns once more to remembering that God is king, that he brings salvation, that he is ruler of creation. He pleads for God to act.

Christ tells us to keep asking, to persist, not to give up, but to keep hoping and knocking. Sometimes it seems that it takes forever for a prayer to be answered, or the answer is against our preference. When something is in the open-ended

category, it seems fair to keep asking with deep trust that God is loving, faithful, and intervenes for our good. When uncertainty gives me anxiety, relinquishing my imaginary control and humbly recognizing God's sovereignty gives peace. Then when prayers are answered, there is no pride, just gratitude. The scriptures affirm the wisdom in God's timing and purposes, and we can claim that.

Have I learned to persist in prayer? Is there something I am asking for that I can trust will come at the right time?

The Cup--Psalms 75-77



Do this in remembrance of me, Sandra Bowden

In the garden, Christ prayed that he might not have to drink “this cup”, but accepted that if it was God's will he would do so. The cup referred to the suffering he was to experience. In Psalm 75:8 there is a cup of judgment, a cup of wine the wicked will drink.

This is one of seven references to drinking the cup of God's anger in the Hebrew scriptures. The theme is also repeated twice in Revelation. Christ drank that cup

of judgment on our behalf, and now it has been transformed into a cup of communion.

These three Psalms present God as a fair judge who shows compassion to those who cry out to him for mercy. Because Christ drank the cup of judgment, there is a cup of compassion for us. The Eucharistic cup comforts us as a reminder that our sins are forgiven, our suffering is understood, and we are part of a community of love.

As we repeatedly take communion, we enter into the remembrance of God's mercy on us, his removal of all judgment and provision of love and grace. This celebration of mercy is something we do not take lightly.

Do I know I am under God's mercy? Do I celebrate this when I take communion?

Parables — Psalms 78-79



Three prophets: Ezekiel, Sandra Bowden

Christ chose parables as his preferred mode of teaching, and Asaph used Israel's history as a parable. The lesson is that even though the people rejected God, He

continued to love them and show mercy. “I will speak to you in a parable” is quoted from this Psalm in the New Testament to explain Christ’s teaching style.

In his preface to Psalm 78 Asaph emphasized the importance of sharing history with new generations. He castigated Israel (Ephraim), for forgetting history. He reminded them of the exodus, wilderness wanderings, plagues, the conquest and the time of the judges.

He concluded with the start of David’s reign, and high hopes that the people would now be obedient, recalling this checkered history. We know these hopes were not realized and that David, Solomon, and the subsequent kings failed, with exile resulting. All of these ancestors of Christ and all of the culture of his people are presented with no idealization, no whitewashing, and no excuses.

Psalm 79 describes Jerusalem’s destruction and the beginning of exile, so was written by Asaph’s descendant who returned from exile. Though the people had failed, God’s mercy still did not fail and his promises were fulfilled. Their stories provide parables for our lives, full of warnings and full of hope.

Christ’s choice to teach through stories, the scriptural preference for story, and the innate love we have for stories encourage us to use this way of teaching and learning ourselves.

Do I enter in to the stories of scripture and find their meaning for me?

Sheep and Vine — Psalms 80-83



The Good Shepherd, Henry Ossawa Tanner

Christ called himself a shepherd, and called us his sheep. Psalm 80 says God is Israel’s shepherd, and Christ extended this to all who listen to him. Christ called himself the vine, and called us his branches. The Psalmist called God a gardener who needed to care for his vine.

This is tender imagery of being loved and cared for that reoccurs throughout scripture as the fundamental reality of our relationship to God. Both are images of dependency and need for care. The theme of wandering sheep and fruitless vines reoccurs as an expression of God's disappointment that his care is not appreciated, and that we his people choose to resist the healthy dependency he desires.

At the same time, there are images given us of our nature as strong and independent in our relationship to him, including the characterization that we can take on the divine nature. Christ quoted from Psalm 82:6 to counter the accusation of blasphemy by the religious leaders when they picked up stones to kill him because he was making himself to be God. He insisted that those who believe in him become God's children. While that is also an image of dependency, it carries a sense of dignity and power that as members of God's royal family, we are not to be taken lightly.

So while we celebrate that Christ came as uniquely God's son, we must not forget that he gives us his nature and he gives us the opportunity to also be God's children. Children, sheep, vines, whichever metaphor used, they all remind us of a loving, caring relationship that we can enjoy with God.

Am I in a loving relationship of dependency on God?

God's Home — Psalms 84-87, John 14:1-3



Nativity, Shiv Bogart

Christ left his home in heaven to live as a pilgrim among us, and then promised that he will take us home. All of scripture can be framed as a story of returning home, having left God's presence and needing Christ to take us back.

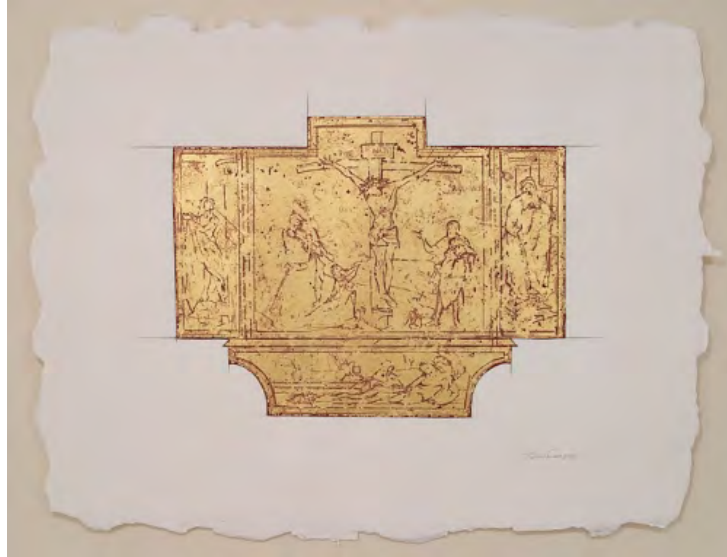
The Psalmist celebrated God's home: the temple, Israel's land, and Jerusalem. Psalm 84 celebrates the beauty of God's home, the temple, and that what makes it a true home is God's presence. Psalm 85 celebrates the whole land as home. Psalm 86 celebrates that all nations will come and find their home in God at the end of time. Psalm 87 speaks of the city of Jerusalem as God's home.

To bring us home, however, Christ chose homelessness as both a child and a traveling preacher. His homeless family, staying uncomfortably in a place which was temporary, giving birth in difficult circumstances, reminds us that this sacrifice, this identification with those with no home, is his choice. "No room" is part of the story, and we can see Christ in people without a home. If we can find even small ways of showing hospitality to those who need a place, we are joining into the story of Christ bringing us to our ultimate home. Our churches at their

best are welcoming homes of faith, and our own homes can prefigure the hospitality of heaven.

*Is my home open and dedicated to serving as a place for those who need hospitality?
Do I hold my home lightly, knowing that my ultimate home is with Christ?*

Suffering and Death--Psalm 88-89, Luke 24:16-21



Isenheim Altarpiece after Matthias Grünewald, Sandra Bowman

We know that Christ suffered and died for us, but this was unexpected for the disciples since the Psalmists and other prophets largely spoke of a future reigning king. These two Psalms speak of death and of a suffering king, and with other prophetic voices, the crucifixion could be foreseen.

In Psalm 88 “dead” or “death” is repeated seven times, and other allusions include “the lowest pit, darkest depths, grave, place of destruction, and land of forgetfulness.” The final line says that only darkness remains. There is no expression of hope. Essentially this is a poem about death.

Does this not express death’s finality, the depressing end the disciples thought had come when Christ died and was buried? The abandonment by the Psalmist’s friends reminds us that all of Christ’s friends left him as well. Psalm 89 begins optimistically, pointing to the eternal king, myriad angels at worship, the firstborn son of God, his unending covenant, endless throne, and unending dynasty. But the Psalm ends with concern that enemies are mocking this anointed king. This detour into suffering remained troubling and unexplained.

The short doxology at the end which blesses God forever is a coda for the third book of the Psalms and like those at the end of the other books. Neither Psalm, then,

ends with hope or joy. They end in the bewilderment and loss we recall each year on Holy Saturday. Death and the grave seem to have won. When all seems lost, sadness is the appropriate response.

Do I know that Christ is with me in any experiences of death and pain? Do I know that Christ's coming is bringing an end to death and pain?

Book 4: Psalms 90 - 106

Miracles — Psalms 90-92, Matthew 4:5-7



Sieger Koder

Prophetic references to Christ's miracles include the call in Psalm 90 to notice God's miracles and the celebration in Psalm 91 of how great God's miracles are. Miracles do not guarantee belief. We are reminded that Israel had seen God's miracles, and yet they still did not trust him. Hebrews 4 quotes the warning from Psalm 95, and urges us to enter God's rest. If we do not notice God's miracles on our behalf, our hearts are turning from God, and we are not resting in appreciation.

In Psalm 92:4 we are told, "I sing for joy at what your hands have done." Often we see creation as the work of God's hands, but when we think of Christ, we remember how often he healed with his hands, multiplied bread with his hands, and most touchingly, saved us through the nails in his hands on the cross.

So, I pray. Prayer can seem like something thoroughly unrealistic and useless, a form of talking to oneself. But Christ told us to pray privately and he would see to it that we were honored by real world events. As things change there is wonder, whether we describe something as a miracle or not.

Do I live with a sense of the miraculous?

The Lord Reigns—Psalm 93-99



Cristo Resucitado, Maximino Cerezo Barredo

We know that Christ has been raised to rule over all, and three of these Psalms begin with the proclamation that “The Lord reigns,” and another repeats this mid-Psalm. They refer to God as king, a great king above all Gods who is also our creator. Psalm 93 speaks of him as king with an eternal throne whose reign is characterized by holiness. Psalm 94 refers to his rulership by speaking of him as the judge of all the earth. Psalm 95 refers to him as king, creator, and shepherd. Psalm 96 tells us to proclaim this good news, to tell all nations. Psalm 97 promises that every nation will see his glory. Psalm 98 declares he has won victory, and Psalm 99 once more acknowledges him as king.

What does it practically mean for me that God in Christ reigns? We know from other scriptures that Christ has made us part of the royal family and we have an inheritance and privileges as a result. We know that even if things go terribly wrong, because Christ is king, we can count on justice being done. Because he is king, he has wealth, connections, wisdom and power that he shares with us. We are comforted in our suffering to see that when Christ suffered on the cross, even then

his kingship was acknowledged on a sign above his head. That kingship became evident at his ascension and we are beneficiaries of his great power in our lives today.

In his birth, childhood and ministry, however, this kingship was hidden and only hinted at or known to a few. In our daily ordinary lives, our royal status and Christ as our king may feel a little obscure and unlikely. But the same message of kingship threads through the Christmas stories: the Magi coming to seek the newborn King of the Jews as one of those mysterious reminders. Even when life feels overwhelming, we can look up and remember that we belong to the king's family.

Do I live with the vision that Christ is King?

Joy — Psalms 100-101



Make a joyful noise, Sandra Bowden

The Psalms are full of joy, reminding us that Christ is in joyful communion with his Father and with the world. Psalm 100 begins with a call for the whole earth to shout for joy, to sing joyful songs. We are to enter his presence with thanksgiving and praise. Psalm 101 sings praise for God's justice and with a desire to be holy and bring holiness to the nation.

The disciples returned to Christ delighted in their work to bring holiness through their spiritual authority. In response Christ told them to take joy in being citizens of heaven, and he was filled with joy in the Spirit for giving spiritual discernment to simple childlike people. He promised overflowing joy, and that no one can rob our joy in him.

Knowing God's love for us, knowing his sovereignty in the world, knowing his redemptive work, and knowing his ultimate triumph gives us a solid basis for joy no matter what the circumstances. Psalms far outstrips any other book with 97 references to "joy," and another 44 references to "rejoice." The poems give us plenty of ideas of what to be joyful about, particularly, of course, God himself.

Joy is so often a matter of perspective, of noticing what is terrific, and a matter of being present to God and life in this moment. Even in difficulties, there can be humor or beauty to remind us that life is good. Paul encouraged us to always be joyful (I Thessalonians 5:16), implying that it really is a choice we can make.

Is my life full of joy?

Creator — Psalms 102-104, Hebrews 1:10-12



Mountains were brought forth, Sandra Bowden

Christ is creator, something prophesied in Psalm 102 and affirmed in Hebrews. Once we see that this is a Messianic Psalm we see references to Christ everywhere in it: my days vanish like smoke, my days cut short, my enemies taunt me, it is time to show compassion in Zion, he will appear in his glory, a people not yet created will praise the Lord, etc.

Christ compared God to a compassionate Father, as does Psalm 103. God's compassion is cited in many ways: he hears the prayers of the destitute, releases those condemned to die, forgives sins, heals diseases, ransoms from death, fills our

lives with good things, he is merciful and gracious, and extends salvation to our grandchildren.

In Psalm 104 he is once more celebrated as creator in one of the loveliest nature poems in the Psalter. Appreciating and enjoying nature's beauty seems like one of the easiest and best ways to learn to pray. Here we are given a model, and our celebration can be a daily source of joy to us, simply noticing things around us and being grateful for them, delighting in them, and thanking Christ as creator.

Do I celebrate Christ as creator and God as my father? Do I celebrate God's creation and delight in its beauty?

Israel's Miraculous History — Psalms 105-106



Twelve Tribes, Sandra Bowden

In the Gospels, the word “miracle” occurs twenty-five times and “miraculous” an additional eleven times, an indication of how important these signs were in validating Christ’s ministry. The miracles God did for Israel parallel Christ’s miracles, culminating in the greatest miracle of all, the coming of Christ.

Zechariah, in his celebration of the birth of John the Baptist, alludes to the promises in Psalms 105 and 106 that God will fulfill the covenant he made with Israel’s ancestors and rescue them from their enemies. “Now we will be saved from our enemies and from all who hate us. He has been merciful to our ancestors by remembering his sacred covenant—the covenant he swore with an oath to our ancestor Abraham.” (Luke 1:71-73)

We are told to tell others about the miracles and to think about what he has done for us and for Israel. There are so many glorious miracles we cannot praise him enough, but the sad truth is that the people who came out of Egypt soon forgot the miracles they had seen.

We are not so different from Israel in that we so easily forget God’s interventions in our history. We have so little faith sometimes, that we fall into the same

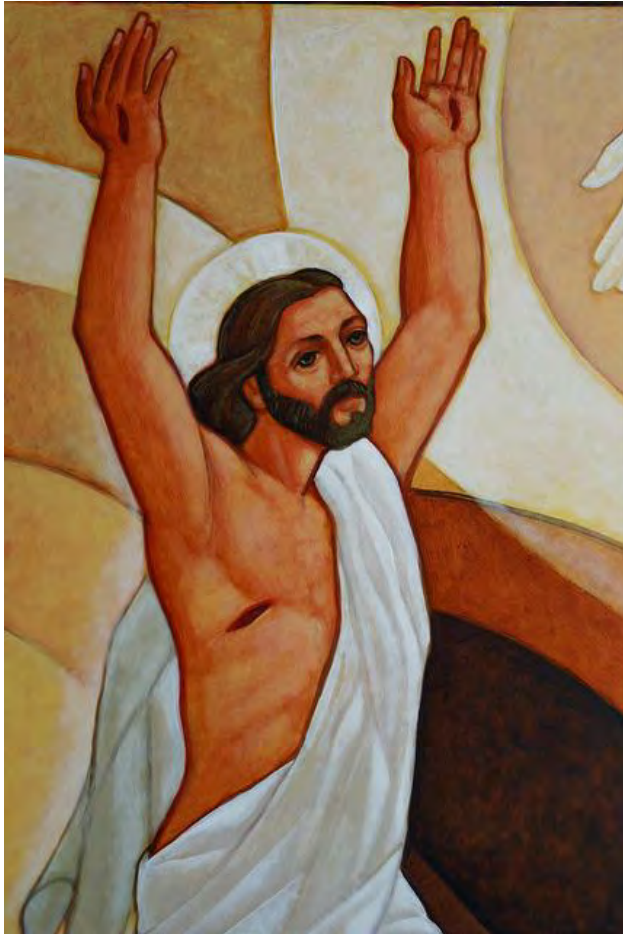
complaining ways of the people. Making lists of things that have seemed miraculous to us and reviewing them can counter our forgetfulness.

We live in a faith full of promises and fulfillment of those promises. The miracles of Israel continue for us today. The church has long sung Zechariah's song as a celebration of the great miracle of Christ's coming.

Do I live with the excitement of expecting the miraculous?

Book 5: Psalms 107 - 150

Christ's victory— Psalms 107-109



Resucitó, Maximino Cerezo Barredo

These Psalms foreshadow Christ's ministry, his spiritual victories, and his suffering and betrayal. Psalm 107:9 speaks of filling the hungry with good things which previews Mary's song of praise where she celebrates this same reversal of fortune

brought by Messiah (Luke 1:53). Psalm 107:29 previews one of Jesus' miracles: "He makes the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still." The refrain repeated four times, "he saved them from their distress" when they called "Lord, help!" is truly an image of Christ on earth responding to hunger in the desert, freeing prisoners like the demoniac in chains, healing people sick and near death, and calming the storm at sea.

Judas' as the figure deserving of terrible judgement described in Psalm 109 is validated by Acts 1:20 where a need to replace him is justified by quoting verse 8. Christ as the object of mockery in this Psalm is reinforced by Matthew 27:39 where those shaking their heads were prophesied in verse 25. The conquest over every person and spiritual force against Christ is celebrated.

Psalm 108 is a celebration of victory. As we see Christ in this, we can also see that his spiritual victory is a preface to our spiritual victories. We too can still say "Lord, help!" and expect his interventions in our distresses. We do not have a gloomy faith that is resigned to everything going wrong, but rather a faith that expects good to conquer evil in large and small ways in our lives now. When faced with a tough challenge it is bracing to remember that we Christians are to expect victories.

Is my hope for all my challenges in life focused on Christ and his work?

Seated at God's Right Hand — Psalms 110-112



Adoration after Fabriano, Sandra Bowden

Psalm 110 was unquestionably seen as the primary Messianic Psalm by New Testament writers. It became a traditional reading for Christmas Day in the Church of England.

The Psalmist prophesied that Christ would be seated in victory at God's right hand. This verse is quoted five times in the New Testament, giving it prominence out of at least 100 Messianic prophecies in the Psalms, and 100 direct quotations. Peter

quoted the same verse in his Pentecost sermon, and the writer of Hebrews did so to demonstrate Christ's superiority to the angels.

Christ quoted the psalm, noting the paradox in saying Messiah is David's son and is David's Lord. C.S. Lewis wrote that Christ was "hinting at the mystery of the Incarnation by pointing out a difficulty which only it could solve." In *Reflection on the Psalms* he wrote:

We find in our Prayer Books that Psalm 110 is one of those appointed for Christmas Day. We may at first be surprised by this. There is nothing in it about peace and good-will, nothing remotely suggestive of the stable at Bethlehem. It seems to have been originally either a coronation ode for a new king, promising conquest and empire, or a poem addressed to some king on the eve of a war, promising victory. It is full of threats. The "rod" of the king's power is to go forth from Jerusalem, foreign kings are to be wounded, battlefields to be covered with carnage, skulls cracked. The note is not "Peace and goodwill" but "Beware. He's coming."

While Messianic victory is implicit in the incarnation, perhaps verse 3 explains the choice of the Psalm as a Christmas Day reading. As a Messianic Psalm the phrase—"the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth" (KJV)—makes poetic reference to Christ, the newborn from Mary's virgin womb. Beautiful and wonderful!

Because He is at God's right hand and coming in power, He is full of blessings. The Psalms that follow are full of joy for those who fear God. Psalm 111 celebrates God's miracles, splendor, beauty, grace, mercy, keeping promises, and his ransom. Psalm 112 celebrates happiness, successful children, blessing a whole generation, wealth, good deeds, light bursting into the darkness, all going well, not being overcome by evil circumstances, trust when there is bad news, and influence and honor. The Incarnation changes everything and sets the entire world in the direction of wholeness.

As I enjoy the warmth of family and Christmas joy, am I celebrating that his coming has begun a great transformation of all things?

The Rejected Stone — Psalms 113-118, Matthew 21:42-44



Jesucristo, Maximino Cerezo Barredo

These Psalms are the Hallel prayer, recited on Jewish holidays, and probably what Jesus and his disciples sang at the Last Supper. Each one of them has elements prophetic of Christ, climaxing with a Psalm repeatedly quoted in the New Testament.

Psalm 113 tells us that the poor, and the weak will be lifted to honor. The most archetypal case is Christ. He was rejected to the point of death, and then exalted to the right hand of God. In Psalm 114:7 the earth will tremble; this happened both at the death and resurrection of Christ. In Psalm 115 we are warned that idols have non-functioning mouths, eyes, ears, noses, hands, feet, and throats. But Christ came and had all these very human things, and was truly God.

Psalm 116 points to Christ who was entangled with the cords of death, knew the anguish of the grave, lifted the cup of salvation in the Eucharist, was delivered from death in resurrection, and walked among the living between resurrection and ascension. The call for all nations to praise God in Psalm 117 is cited in Romans 15:11 as an announcement of salvation for the Gentiles.

But Psalm 118 is particularly rich in Messianic allusions. Verse 26 was quoted to welcome Christ to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The following verse mentions joining the procession with boughs in hand, something the people did as they sang. Christ quoted verse 26 regarding his second coming.

Verses 22-23 are an important Messianic quote regarding the rejected cornerstone that was repeated by Christ and three apostles. The pun between “stone” and “son” (*eben* and *ben*) makes a fitting allusion to God’s son. The foundation stone on the Temple Mount under the Holy of Holies or under the altar was an ordinary-looking rock which one might consider discarding, but became Judaism’s holiest site. How appropriate that all these allusions to his work were sung by Christ and his disciples at the Last Supper.

The New Testament quotes affirm that these were prophetic poems, preparing the way for the great mystery of God living among us.

Do I celebrate the fulfillment of God’s prophecies?

Christ the Word— Psalm 119, John 6:63



Decalogue, Sandra Bowden

Christ is the Word and this Psalm celebrates the Word. The Word gives wisdom and Christ is wisdom. Celebrating the Hebrew scriptures, the poem is an acrostic, starting each stanza with the same letter, then going through the alphabet. In honor of the form, I made my own acrostic, and the number indicates the verse from which the line is drawn:

All my heart seeks you. (2)
Buried in my heart are your words. (11)
Clear my eyes to see truth. (18)
Delight in your miracles satisfies me. (27)
Entering your path gives me happiness, (35)
Failure isn't possible when it comes to your love. (41)
Guff from the proud doesn't stop me. (51)
Have mercy on me as you promised. (58)
I used to wander off until you disciplined me. (67)
Just as you promised, you surround me with mercy. (76, 77)
Keeping your ways keeps me from shame. (80)
Longing for your salvation gives me hope. (81)
Must I wait to see your promises come true? (84)
Never will I forget you for you restore health and joy. (93)
O how I love you and your word! (97)
Paths are well-lit with the lamp of your word. (105)
Questioning you is not right. (113)
Rejecting your principles is not right. (118)
Sustained faith in your salvation is right. (117)
Truths in your promises will be fulfilled. (123)
Up above you can look down on me with love. (135)
Very trustworthy and tested are your promises. (140)
When I get up I cry out to you for help. (147)
Xtreme sorrow makes me need your protection. (153)
Your word is a great treasure to me. (162)
Zig-zagging, I leave your ways. Please come find me. (176)

As we immerse ourselves in scripture, our hope is that we might through it come into closer contact with the living word, Christ himself. As we see the complexity and beauty of the scriptures we find new dimensions in our understanding of Christ.

Do I truly delight in learning God's word?

Psalms of Ascent — Psalm 120-134



Jubilate Deo, Sandra Bowden

Christ knew and sang the Psalms. These Psalms of ascent were sung on the way to Jerusalem for three mandated feasts: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. As a child with his family, and as an adult with his disciples, Christ walked to Jerusalem's festivals, singing, talking, and part of holiday crowds.

Well-loved lines are in these songs that have made their way into our current hymns. Themes include God's protection, his city, his mercy, liberation, security, restoration, rest, humility, harmony and blessing. In Psalm 116 we have resurrection hints once more: "you, Lord, have delivered me from death."

In the middle of these songs, which were sung as families traveled and celebrated together, is tender feminine imagery for God. In Psalm 131 Christ's call for those of the kingdom to be like children is foreshadowed in the imagery that the Psalmist has learned to be a contented child with its mother.

In Psalm 132:11 the Lord swore he would enthrone one of David's descendants on an eternal throne in Zion, and adorn him with a radiant crown. This can only be Christ the King whose triumph in Jerusalem established the eternal kingdom. Because of his humanness in the gospels, we sometimes lose sight of his glorious crown and the regal dignity of his throne.

The journey to Jerusalem singing these songs was a journey to anticipate the coming of that great king. How remarkable that he went with the crowd in disguise, the hidden king, only to be revealed after suffering.

What music has been most spiritually helpful and moving for me?

Anger and Justice— Psalms 135-138



By the Waters of Babylon, Sandra Bowden

Christ and the Psalmist part ways regarding anger. Christ speaks of its dangers, the need to quickly reconcile with others, and the need to bless enemies. The Psalmist is sure God is as angry with his enemies as he is, and suggests methods for revenge. One of the most dreadful images is that of smashing babies against rocks.

C.S. Lewis in *Reflections on the Psalms* devoted a chapter to these vengeful Psalms and began: “In some of the Psalms the spirit of hatred which strikes us in the face is like heat from a furnace mouth. In others the same spirit ceases to be frightful only by becoming (to a modern mind) almost comic in its naivety.”

While I cannot identify with wanting what the Psalmist wants done here, I can identify with being angry enough for wanting his enemies to be punished. If I express my anger and outrage to God, it dissipates. I become calm enough to know he can deal with the situation, and I can recognize my faults in the matter. I can then forgive whether the other is ready for reconciliation or not. Used this way, anger becomes a gift and we learn to deal wisely with situations that have aroused our anger.

We are reminded that this level of human cruelty has been casually used by many rulers throughout history. The natural response to this is a desire for revenge. Herod did destroy innocent infants, and he desired to destroy Christ. The innocent who are killed by this level of outrageous abuse of political power thereby bear the image of Christ and are a reminder to us that we are called to peacemaking and protection of the weak.

Have I learned to give my anger, even righteous anger against injustice, to God?

Formed by God--Psalm 139



Vladimir Madonna, Sandra Bowden

This Psalm celebrates the great mystery of God's gift of himself, formed in a human womb. The celebration of how God mysteriously forms each human being, is even more remarkable when we realized he chose to go through that process himself.

"You made all the delicate inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous--and how well I know it. You watched me as I was being

formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. you saw me before I was born.” (vs. 13-15)

It is reassuring to us to know that God has plans for our lives that he will accomplish, even when we wander from him. But for Christ who lived in perfect obedience, it can most truly be said that “every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.” (vs. 16)

It is staggering to think God not only limited himself to human infancy, but even to the very process of human development in a womb. But this is what the church has taught and celebrates. Each forming infant is in the image of Christ and is to be treasured as a gift from God.

Does God becoming man fill me with awe and wonder?

January 7

A Powerful God — Psalms 140-144



Red Cross, Sandra Bowden

Christ tells us to persist in prayer, and the Psalmist demonstrates it. There are repeated pleas for God to act: "I am calling, hurry, listen, I cry, I am in constant prayer, I look to you, I cry out, I plead, I pour out, I pray, hear my cry, rescue me, hear my prayer, answer me, I reach out, I thirst for you, come quickly, save me, bend down, reach down, rescue me."

Some Christians focus on faith and positive expectations to an extent it leaves no room for longing, uncertainty, and desperation. But the Psalmist can admit how he feels: "I am overwhelmed, I am losing all hope, I am paralyzed with fear, my depression deepens, and bring me out of my distress." He asks because he knows God is powerful and able to act for him.

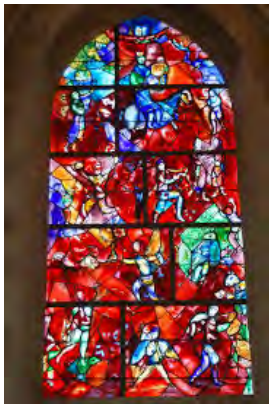
Psalm 144 focuses on God's power, referring to awesome natural phenomenon, including a volcano. I live near an active volcano, so there are days when a huge cloud of smoke billows up from the Volcán de Fuego. "Fuego" means fire, and at times there are rumbling loud noises, shaking, bright fire shooting up, and red-hot lava streaming down the mountain, all reminiscent of this Psalm. When I watch my volcano, I think about it as a sign of God's power, and the amazing show as provoked by God's touch. Given that, why not have more confidence God will hear my prayers?

Psalm 146:8 prophecies that the eyes of the blind will be opened, something Christ did and pointed to as a sign that he was Messiah. This miraculous evidence of his creative power has in some measure been extended to us today as we have learned to intervene medically with glasses and surgeries.

Our desperate need and God's mighty power are complementary. Christ demonstrated his mighty power in miracles and in the resurrection and that power has been made available to us. When I am overwhelmed, I remember this.

Do I celebrate God's power to meet my needs?

Worship — Psalms 145-150



Chichester Cathedral window, Marc Chagall

Christ is the king worthy of our worship. The king and kingdom we celebrate were announced in two-thirds of Christ's 46 parables. The nature of that kingdom, prefigured in these Psalms, is a kingdom of peace. Christ's message of the kingdom draws from the Psalms that described it as glorious, everlasting, universal, with God himself as king.

The celebration of Christ as the king entering Jerusalem was full of singing, and the last two Psalms are praise full of music and dance. The Psalmist finds praise

delightful, and in turn is grateful God delights in us. The result is a crescendo of happy praise, delighting in nature, in music, in dancing, and in God's victory.

Chagall gives us a joyous depiction of Psalm 150 and all the instruments being used in the worship of God. The stained-glass image in the Cathedral of Chichester England has a red background, an image of King David on a donkey on the top, surrounded by all the musicians and worshippers. That image evokes Christ coming into Jerusalem on his donkey, and the praise surrounding him.

Part of what is attractive about modern Christianity is the great, cheerful, celebratory music that has become so much a part of our worship. We are delighted as we rejoice in praise in a congregation, a way to celebrate our king. In this book that affirms all of our emotions from sad to mad, we cannot forget that being glad is central to our relationship with God.

Am I living a life of joyful worship?