

**Sermon – 3<sup>rd</sup> Pentecost**  
**Psalm 25 & Luke 23:44-56**  
**June 10, 2018**

**“The Book That Is a Library – The Poetry Section”**

One evening during my 8<sup>th</sup> grade year in school, my mom answered the phone, said “*just a minute please,*” put the phone to her chest and said; “*it’s your teacher Mr. Casey.*” I might have said “*it’s who*” but I definitely thought “*oh, oh, what did I do!*” Of the several trajectories for that phone conversation that flashed into my head – none of them even approximated why Mr. Casey called. He wanted me to join a group of other students in a poetry writing class! I even think my mom said; “*you’ve got to be kidding!*” Well, ok, I could construct a sentence, but creative writing, much less verse, did not exactly fall from my fingers, if you know what I mean.

But let’s be honest, that could be said of a lot of people. To the question “who is your favorite poet?” I’d wager a lot of you would answer “ahhhhh.” And I get it - but to the question “how many books of poetry you own?” if you’d be tempted to repeat that phrase most often associated with visits to the dentist, I have some encouraging news for you - if you own a bible, you own a book of poetry. Between one quarter to one third of the Old Testament is poetry. That may encourage some readers, who don’t groove on ancient historical narrative or meticulous cultic law or lengthy, razor-sharp prophetic speech. But poetry can be hard to understand (and as I would learn in Mr. Casey’s workshop –darn near impossible to write!)

Poetry occurs in almost all Old Testament books, but as you can see in the overhead, the Christian version of the Old Testament has a “poetry section”. Sometimes you might hear these works referred to as “wisdom literature” – from a Hebrew word “*chokmah*” which is commonly found in them. Hebrew wisdom or if you will poetry is not the “*how do I love thee, let me count the ways*” language we associate with English verse. But it does express passion, and it is quite earthy, even practical. Hebrew wisdom gives expression to the wisdom of God deduced from observation of creation. Wisdom is gained by and reflected in a life lived in harmony with God within God’s orderly creation. Wisdom is the art of living the way God created us to live.

Wisdom to Israel came through fear of the Lord – a term best understood as trust in the Lord. Examples of this abound in the poetry section of the library we call the Bible. Job 1:1 says “*there was man...whose name was Job...who feared the Lord.*” Proverbs 1:7 says “*the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*” and Proverbs 3:5 famously implores a person to “*trust in the Lord, with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.*” Psalm 19:9 says “*the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.*” Many a preacher begins their sermon preparations asking for wisdom by invoking Psalm 19:14, which says “*may the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in your sight.*” While lacking in specific references to Israel’s history and major figures like Moses and Abraham, the poetry books are nonetheless brimming with examples of Israel’s faith and her life lessons.

And particularly of the Psalms Martin Luther was downright effusive in his praise – saying of it’s writers “*we can look into their hearts and see what kind of thoughts they had, how their hearts were disposed, and how they acted in all kinds of situations, in danger and in need, then adding “that they speak these words to God and with God, this is the best thing of all.”*

But how then do we read the Psalms as Christians? I’m going to propose, as I did last week, and as I will in the weeks ahead, that we read them the way Jesus did, or read them “through Jesus” even as I acknowledge, as Luther did, that the Psalms are the personal and corporate faith of Israel – which take up issues and seasons of life common to every human being – seasons of celebration, seasons of remorse, days of doubts and moments of, dare I as a Lutheran say - grandiose faith and confidence in God. Psalm 25:12-13 asks; “*who, then, are those who fear the Lord? He will instruct them in the ways they should choose. They will spend their days in prosperity, and their descendants will inherit the land.*”

The Psalm expresses wisdom Israel confessed though as we know often failed to heed – there is a way of life that leads to life – prosperity being the word chosen to denote it, and conversely, a way that leads to death – shame being the word used to denote this other way. Thus Psalm 25:20-22 says; “*let not me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope, Lord, is in you.*” So how then did Jesus read Psalms like this? For that we look to our lesson from Luke.

I don’t know what Jesus was thinking as he was dying. How can anyone know any dying person’s thoughts? Fully God, Jesus was able to show mercy to his enemies – even to the point of forgiving them. But what of the “fully human” Jesus on the cross - did he think back on his life like we might? Could he have wondered if his own “*integrity and uprightness*” would protect him? In Matthew 27:46 Jesus used a Psalm to express agony – Psalm 22:1 “*my God, my God, why have you forsaken me.*” In Luke however a portion of Psalm 31:5 formed his dying breath – “*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*”, which goes on to say; “*you have redeemed me O, Lord, faithful God.*” You want trust – there you have it.

Recall again what Luther said of the Psalm writers; “*we can look into their hearts and see what kind of thoughts they had, how their hearts were disposed, and how they acted in all kinds of situations, in danger and in need...that they speak these words to God and with God, this is the best thing of all.*” What can we say – it’s nice to know a little poetry. We could all do well it seems to read what Jesus read – so that we might understand what it means to faithfully live and faithfully die. Luther said; “*if you would see the holy Christian Church painted in living color and shape, comprehended in one little picture, then take up the Psalms.*”

What you will see there is the wisdom of God – gifted to you and I through the earthy, honest poetic expressions of real people. But what you will also see is how you’ve been redeemed - loved beyond your wildest thought, by Jesus - God’s fondest thought. AMEN