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Psalms and Songs Reflections

November 6, 2022

Psalm 139:1-18

Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground[a] and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being (Genesis 2:7).

Do not fear, for I am with you;

do not be afraid, for I am your God;

I will strengthen you; I will help you;

I will uphold you with my victorious right hand (Isaiah 41:10).

Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;

we are the clay, and you are our potter;

we are all the work of your hand (Isiah 64:8).

See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands;

your walls are continually before me (Isaiah 49:16).

Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe (John 20:27).

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In the beginning of time, God reached down into the earth God had created, digging into the new clay with her fingers. She rolled and formed this clay into the likeness of humankind. And then, this all-powerful God, breathed her breath into the tiny nostrils of that person, creating a life that God would say was in her own image.¹

The stories of God’s hands are dispersed throughout the holy scripture, reminding us over and over again of this moment. This moment that God, God’s self touched humankind with her hands — a tactile God, a God who is not distant or detached — a God with dirt under her fingernails.

The prophet Isaiah speaks of God’s hands often, as that which hold us up when we are afraid, as that which helps and strengthens us when the world makes little sense. Gods hands are presented as that of a potter, forming our lives as clay. Isaiah also reminds of the suffering, sacrificing God, the God who carves our names into their hands.

It’s later in the Gospel, we encounter this suffering once again, as God’s hands are pierced in a Roman cruxifixion. And yet, even after this suffering and death, it is his hands that Jesus

¹ Genesis 1:26-28

reaches out to the disciple who could not believe in the resurrection without first touching the hands of Christ.

In that moment, we are reminded again of the hands that formed humankind, these scarred hands that we continually are invited to touch, the hands by which we are embraced...

It was before the Lord, who chose me in place of your father and all his household, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord—I will dance before the Lord. I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be humbled in my own eyes... (2 Samuel 6:21-22).

When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him (Luke 5:11).

He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them, for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on” (Luke 21:1-4).

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So what do we do in the presence of this sacrificing God? How do we honor our divine likeness?

I think, we can begin by looking honestly into our own hearts: what are we holding as sacred?

Are we willing to let loose that to which we cling so tightly, in gratitude for this God?

David was the king of Israel, and yet, as the ark of the covenant — the symbol of the very presence of God — entered the city, David threw off his royal garments, and dressed only in common linen, he danced in the streets. He led a celebration of music and dancing and sacrifices, giving celebratory food to the multitude of Israel...

But he was met by those in the royal household with disdain. In their eyes, his behavior was undignified. And, perhaps it was. But David joyfully sacrificed his earthly dignity in celebratory gratitude to God.

Simon Peter was a fisherman. He and his partners, James and John were on a boat, attempting to do their jobs. But there were no fish to be caught that day. Yet as they rolled their nets in defeat, a stranger shouted out to them from the shore, encouraging them to cast their nets one more time. When they did, their nets were so full of fish, they could not bring them up onto the boats. This stranger, Jesus, then called these men to follow him, which they did.

Immediately. Without hesitation. They sacrificed their livelihood — their stability — that which made sense to the world, to participate in this call of God.

One day, Jesus was in the Temple, and he saw a poor widow place two copper coins in the offering. His response: “this poor widow has put in more than all of these, for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.”

This woman sacrificed stability and logic — instead giving to God all she had, and holding nothing back.

In these three stories, I see people who are actively reflecting this sacrificing God — they hold nothing back as more sacred than their gratitude: not their dignity, not their stability, not their reputations, not the plans they had for their lives.

All are laid at the feet of the God who created them.