



There's something about Spring that just brings out a newness and freshness of life around us. Flowers blooming, buds on trees sprouting, Easter just around the corner and like geese flying north from the winter, our own flock of 11 gents gathered at LCOC on Saturday, 8 April 2017 for the monthly Men's Prayer Breakfast. We were treated to a wonderful feast of ham & egg casseroles, mini-muffins, fruit, juice and java. Our tables were again festively adorned in the pastel colors of the Easter season, with lovely little flowers and Easter eggs. Great start to the day (as always).

Couldn't help but notice one of our gents being amused by a video being played on his I-phone of a raccoon playing with soap bubbles. Yes, it really doesn't take much more than critters and bubbles to hold the attention of seniors. Meanwhile in the Scandinavian corner, our erstwhile retired Norwegian pastor was reading an old article he came across while doing some Spring cleaning at his house. The article was about his father and when he was being installed at Trinity Church in Duluth, MN. As he read the article, in his sweet pontifical manner, our senior Dane arrived just in time to remark "Hey, you're starting before 7:30"! You simply can't sneak a sunrise past these roosters, that's for sure.

Staying in Scandinavia, one gent recalled a time when the Swedes faced an Akvavit (or aquavit) shortage and many went to Norway to get their beloved flavoured spirit (which by the way typically contains 40% alcohol by volume). Apparently the Swedes got so inebriated they were thrown into jail, only for the Norwegians jailers to lament that they now had all these Swedes to feed as well. If the Norwegians were smart, they would have made those Swedes eat lutefisk. We then had a small discussion about the Church of Latter Day Saints, and how one gent watching the Antiques Roadshow TV program saw an early LDS hymnal be valued at almost \$50,000! We also heard of how well the LDS church embraces the Boy Scouts, as well as how Mormon men are allowed to have multiple wives. Can you imagine that car (or buggy) ride with multiple direction givers and driving critiques!!! With all due respect and apologies up front to all you lovely ladies, but this would make a man reach for the Akvavit for sure and probably eat lutefisk as well. Just sayin'....

Ray had our lesson for the day, and he walked us through the book of Psalms. For as long as people have been alive, we have used poetry and music to express our deepest feelings and to connect our experiences with those of others. The Psalms, a book of songs and poetry from ancient Israel, is like the Bible's playlist for life, giving us a soundtrack for the full range of human emotion, from deep sorrow to incredible joy. Psalms contains 150 prayers, songs and poems (most function as all three), but it is so much more than the shape of its content. The Psalms are a collection of different prayers, each evoking different emotions and experiences of what it means to be human. Some express outrageous joy and praise to the God who created and gives us life. Some give shape to ways of being that instruct and form us as people of faith. Some emerge from the darkness of life, honestly grappling with what it means to live faithfully when suffering and sorrow are all around. Some are situational, written down to be used during festivals that marked important moments in the story of God's people. Some appear to be intimately personal, others overwhelmingly communal. Reading the Psalms, we hear the account of the raw humanity of God's people, and the enduring faithfulness of God to this people in their raw humanity. The Psalms makes prayer a focus for our lives.

Who wrote the Psalms? Many of the psalms are attributed to King David, but it's likely David only wrote some of those, while others were simply attributed to him because of his fame and stature in Israelite history. Many of the psalms were written for (or out of) particular historical situations. For example, the Psalms of Ascent were written to accompany the community as they made their way to Jerusalem for Passover. Many were written during periods of captivity and exile as a way of offering lament and prayers for restoration. In this way, reading Psalms is much like listening to the soundtrack of the community's life – they allow us to discern the emotional pulse of the community at various times. In doing so, they give us language for our own emotions and experiences as the people of God. They provide us with a template for incorporating our feelings into our faith and our relationship with God. The book of Psalms gives us words to use in our prayer lives and expands our understanding of prayer: the Psalms both model and evoke in us artistic, creative, and emotionally honest prayers.

In addition to giving us language and models for prayer, the Psalms continue to be used as liturgy in our personal and communal worship. Reading or singing the Psalms (even when the emotions expressed are not our own) helps shape our identity as people of faith – connecting us with those who have gone before us as well as enabling us to bring the whole

of who we are before God. Some of the Psalms are about how great God is. Others are about how awful life is. How are we supposed to make up our minds about God when this part of the Bible can't do it either? The Psalms are expressions of feelings – words, not actions. The Psalms are not historical records, nor guides for how to behave; rather, they are attempts to integrate the whole of life with the life of faith, to bring all of who we are into our relationships with God.

After reading **Psalm 1**, we discussed that God's law refers to the whole of the Bible. We discussed what are some of the most important teaching we learn in the Bible. Then we discussed how our following of God's law may actually make someone prosper. Next we read **Psalm 150** and discussed where we could find God's sanctuary as well as what modern day instruments could we use to praise him. In **Psalm 13** we discussed why such a sad Psalm would be in the Bible and why does it end with mentioning that we will sing to the Lord? We then took turns choosing one word or phrase that we felt would best expresses how each of us feels when life is hard. Hope, faith and trust were three words offered.

Psalm 8 is a psalm of praise putting words to our moments of awe and wonder at God's goodness, love, and power no matter where we find them. Like a huge pipe organ that has bright, twinkling, high tones alongside deep, dark, low tones, the book of Psalms covers all of life's ups and downs. Some of these poems were written for special occasions like the arrival of a king (**Psalm 20**) or a specific religious celebration (**Psalm 68**). Others were written to pass on wisdom (**Psalm 73**) or to encourage the people to trust God even in the midst of their struggles (**Psalm 91**). **Psalm 100** is for giving grateful praise. This thanksgiving psalm burst with excitement and a desire for the whole world to praise God. This is a song you want to share – to upload for everyone in the world to hear.

Based on one source, we examined the various songwriters of 150 Psalms. David is credited with 80, Solomon for 2, Moses (1) and the sons of Korah (11). We stopped here to read **Exodus 6:24** to find: *"The sons of Korah were Assir, Elkanah and Abiasaph. These were the Korahite clans"*. Next, the sons of Asaph (who is described in **1 Chronicles 6:39**) were credited with 11. Asaph was a descendant of Gershon the son of Levi, therefore he is identified as a member of the Levites. He is also known as one of the three Levites commissioned by David to be in charge of singing in the house of Yahweh. Next, Ethan the Ezrahite is credited with **Psalm 89**, and finally 44 Psalms have anonymous authors.

Some other interesting tidbits included the Psalms are not the only songs in the Bible. The book of **Lamentations** is made up of songs and pain and suffering. **Psalm 119** is the longest one at 723 words, with 22 stanzas representing the 22 letters of ancient Hebrew alphabet. The first song in the Bible is sung by the Israelites, led by Moses and Miriam, in **Exodus 15:1-21**. The Psalms were likely written over 1,000 years, and most likely collected sometime after the end of the Babylonian Captivity. The 150 psalms aren't just one big book of poems. There are actually five different sections to Psalms. No one really knows why, but one common belief is that the five sections reflect different periods in ancient Israel's history. Another belief is that they are a way to honor the five "books of Moses" (known as the Torah or Pentateuch) at the beginning of the Bible.

In closing we are reminded that the book of Psalms connects us to people before us, reminding us that no matter how hard or great life gets, God is always there.

This was a very enjoyable lesson, and gave us a chance to read through so many of the Psalms that grace each of our Sunday services.

Our next LCOC Men's Prayer Breakfast is Saturday, 13 May 2017. I understand we will be discussing Martin Luther in that session, and I am sure it promises to be a most insightful lesson. As always, gents of all ages are welcomed. We do have a wonderful time and you will be amazed at what you might learn about, well, just about anything. Be sure to bring your I-phone, you never know what other pet (or human for that matter) tricks you might wish to share with the group. Who knows, there might also be some good "mom stories" since the next day is Mother's Day!!!