



## Reflections on the Lectionary Readings

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### Psalm 100

*We Enjoy Worship Without Walls*

Psalm 100 is an international Psalm. It breaks the Jewish national boundaries and calls the whole world to worship.

The world is invited in through the Temple gates.  
The exclusive and divisive court of the Gentiles is gone.  
The doors are thrown open.

*Enter the Temple gates with thanksgiving,  
Go into his courts with praise.  
Give thanks to him and praise him.*

Psalm 100:4

Here is a call to be open to people in search of God and to be ready to break out of the restrictions of our traditions to let them worship God.

We have treasures entrusted to our tradition.

*We have traditions we have turned into treasures.*

When does our tradition highlight the treasure of the Gospel?

*When does our treasuring of our tradition hide the Gospel?*

One preacher was known for speaking the central truths of the Gospel in the freshest of language, always catching the core issues of eternity and connecting with the contemporary idiom of today. When asked how he did it, he recalled his twenty years as a missionary in Thailand.

During that time he had to teach the Gospel in three different languages. 'After that', he said, 'you separate the heart of the Gospel out from its cultural packaging'.

We have our historic, denominational packaging.

Our national packaging.

Our Western Enlightenment packaging.

Much of this means that the Church quarantines the Gospel from the world. Its 'good infection' is not let loose.

The psalmist's international call to worship raises questions for us:

- How much time goes into strengthening the packaging? (funds for new organs, fighting about hymns, defending pews)
- How open are we to meet with God in new ways?
- How much of our worship is "for insiders only"
- How concerned are we to call the world to worship with us?

*Sing to the Lord, all the world!*

Psalm 100:1



## **Ezekiel 34:11–16, 20–24**

### *Who Emerge As The Weak?*

The state of society is blamed on bad leadership. Self-indulgent leaders neglect the needy under their care. God's response is a coup d'état as he takes over the leadership himself. In time he will put in place the Leader of his own choice: 'I will give them a king like my servant David to be one shepherd, and he will take care of them.' (23) God gathers the scattered ones in. He leads them by the mountain streams. He looks after those who wander off and those who are hurt. The Shepherd-King cares for the weak and vulnerable.

But who are the weak and vulnerable?

They are not only on the plains of Darfur or the rubbish dumps of Manila. Maybe they live on the well-manicured estates with the mono bloc driveways and the clutch of cars at the door. Behind the veneer of brittle success lurks an anxious child afraid of losing what she has.

Ann Morisy in her book, *Journeying Out*, speaks of the suburban challenge. She speaks of anxiety as an organising principle for suburbanites who like to think that life is under control – watching the cholesterol, eating enough roughage, saving for a pension, being cautious of strangers. She concludes with a hunch that 'anxiety is endemic to suburbia. The more life is experienced as sorted, the greater the fear that something will come and upset the applecart.'

The Shepherd King comes to love us behind the suburban masks and liberate us into the liberty of generosity.

## **Ephesians 1:15–23**

### *We Are Given New Eyes*

We do not need new ideas to be Church without Walls. We need new eyes. With new eyes we can invent the future in partnership with God.

Paul prays for the grace-soaked church of Jesus Christ, spluttering in joy under the cascades grace from the heart of God. His prayer is for new eyes: 'that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened' to see the hope and the power we have in Christ.

Walter Brueggemann speaks of Western society and the Western Church being gripped by the 'myth of scarcity'. We are wealthy in every way, but we have believed the lie that we do not have enough. The antidote to the 'myth of scarcity' is to celebrate 'the liturgy of abundance'. We need new eyes to see that.



One hymn that lifts our eyes to look at Christ the King is *Blessing and Honour and Glory and Power*. The tune is an old Scots folk tune called *Bonnie George Campbell*. The last line ends on strange note (dominant 7th), which does not quite resolve into the tonic. That hanging note leaves us waiting for God's final harmony. The theology of patient hope is written into that final note. It invites us to look with new eyes.

The city of Lisburn in Northern Ireland suffered terribly during the Troubles. On two occasions, the city centre was bombed by the IRA. One of the bombs destroyed one wall of First Lisburn Presbyterian Church. The fine stained glass windows were ruined.

The minister and a few others gathered up some of the fragments of glass from the wreckage. Out of the fragments, an artist created a beautiful little window of Jesus in the Easter dawn. It is called 'The Resurrection Window'. Beauty out of broken fragments.

May God give us the eyes of the heart to see that hope...

## **Matthew 25: 31-46**

### *Little Things Make A Big Difference*

'In one of the smarter west London boroughs, a local GP has a friend who lives in the Philippines. Together they have set up a micro-credit organisation. The GP goes round members of his congregation to ask them to write a cheque for £100. This is then made available to a household in Manila who are reliant on some form of personal enterprise if they are to escape from crippling poverty.

The capacity for enterprise does not seem to be in short supply, but the capital needed to launch an enterprise is scarce. It is this gap that the GP's friends and neighbours have begun to address in a very modest but structured way. Each contributor receives a profile of the Filipino household and an outline of the venture they are trying to develop. If the household becomes able to repay the loan, that sum is 'recycled' and made available to another household.

Every two years, the London-based GP invites three or four of the sponsors to visit Manila with him to see things at first hand and to meet the network of households who are linked through the micro-credit scheme.'

(Ann Morisy, *Journeying Out*, Morehouse, 2004, p105)