



3rd Sunday
after
Pentecost
10 June 2018

THE COL-LECT : Proper 5 Year B

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.

People: **And also with you.**

Celebrant: Let us pray.

O God, from whom all good proceeds: Grant that by your inspiration we may think those things that are right, and by your merciful guiding may do them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

NOTE: James 1:17 seems to be one of the sources for the collect: *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*

This collect engages Platonic and Aristotelian ideas. Platonists have the perfectly transcendent One overflowing through descending triads of intermediaries down to our corrupt material world from which we must be

freed. For Christians, it is Christ, in incarnation, death, and resurrection who comes from God into this imperfect world, and takes us, and with us all creation, back to God. The Aristotelian idea of how we become good is by repeated performance of good acts. For Christians, it is God who declares us good, and thus enables us to do good.¹

<http://liturgy.co.nz/reflections/easter6>

R EADINGS YEAR B PROPER 5 10 JUNE 2018

The Lessons appointed for use today begin on page

1 Samuel 8:4-11, (12-15), 16-20, (11:14-15) or Genesis 3:8-15	A turning point in the history of Israel's leadership God's search for us	3 5
Psalms 138 or Psalm 130	God is everywhere A cry for help	7 8
2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1	Painful realities of life in the ministry	9
Mark 3:20-35	Conflicts and doubts	11



1st Reading: 1 Samuel 8:4-11, (12-15), 16-20, (11:14-15) [Alternate: Genesis 3:8-15]

³INTRODUCTION: To become a people like any other people! That was the idea that many Zionists had in mind when they set out to realize their project to create a Jewish state. The Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel internalized this notion in a central passage that stresses “the natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign State.” Jews, so their argument went, had always been the archetypal “other” in history. Only by ending the “abnormal” situation of their dispersion in a worldwide diaspora and by reestablishing their own state after two millennia would “normality” be regained in the form of a small Jewish state. Thus, the Jews would become “a nation like all other nations” and their state a state like all other states — an imagined Albania.

¹When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. ²The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beer-sheba. ³Yet his sons did not follow in his ways, but turned aside after gain; they took bribes and perverted justice.

1 Samuel 8:4-20

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, ⁵and said to him, ‘You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; *appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations.*’ ⁶But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, ‘Give us a king to govern us.’ Samuel prayed to the Lord, ⁷and the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; *for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.*’ ⁸Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. ⁹Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.’

¹⁰So Samuel reported all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. ¹¹He said, ‘These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; [¹²and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plough his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots.

¹³He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. ¹⁵He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers.]

¹⁶He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. ¹⁷He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. ¹⁸And in that day

you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day.’

¹⁹But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, ‘No! but we are determined to have a king over us, ²⁰so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.’

²¹When Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the LORD. ²²The LORD said to Samuel, “Listen to their voice and set a king over them.” Samuel then said to the people of Israel, “Each of you return home.”

1 Samuel 11:14-15

[¹⁴ Samuel said to the people, ‘Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingship.’ ¹⁵So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal. There they sacrificed offerings of well-being before the Lord, and there Saul and all the Israelites rejoiced greatly.]

The Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Alternate: Genesis 3:8-15

³INTRODUCTION: There are a several tantalizing phrases in this familiar passage from the Creation story. One could emerge from this text in a number of different directions: God searching for us, the nakedness of shame, the pervasive nature of blame, the relational impact of curse. The theme that seems to be most harmonious with the themes presented in the Gospel passage are the resolution of the relational curses in the person and work of Jesus, “their sins will be forgiven them,” and also the pervasive nature of blame, “a house divided against itself shall not stand.”

GEN:1-7

¹Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God say, “You shall not eat from any tree in the garden”?’ ²The

woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³but God said, “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.” ’ ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not die; ⁵for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ ⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. - <http://bible.oremus.org>

8-15

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

⁹But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ ¹⁰He said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.’

¹¹He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’

¹²The man said, ‘The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.’

¹³Then the Lord God said to the woman, ‘What is this that you have done?’ The woman said, ‘The serpent tricked me, and I ate.’

¹⁴The Lord God said to the serpent,
‘Because you have done this,
cursed are you among all animals
and among all wild creatures;
upon your belly you shall go,

and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.
¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.’ [continued below]

The Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

¹⁶To the woman he said,
‘I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children,
yet your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you.’

¹⁷And to the man he said,
‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,
and have eaten of the tree
about which I commanded you,
“You shall not eat of it”,
cursed is the ground because of you;
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread
until you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.’

²⁰ The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of
all who live. ²¹ And the LORD God made garments of skins for the
man and for his wife, and clothed them.



The Response: Psalm 138 *Confitebor tibi*
[Alternate: **Psalm 130**] *De profundis*

³INTRODUCTION: "On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul." (v. 3) I like this image. I called, you answered, you increased my strength of soul. This is the Divine lure, for our souls to grow stronger and stronger, and thus strengthen the soul of the world and the soul that persuades and delights and enjoys the universe.

I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with my whole heart; *
before the gods I will sing your praise.

² I will bow down toward your holy temple
and praise your Name, *

because of your love and faithfulness;

³ For you have glorified your Name *
and your word above all things.

⁴ When I called, you answered me; *
you increased my strength within me.

⁵ All the kings of the earth will praise you, O Lord, *
when they have heard the words of your mouth.

⁶ They will sing of the ways of the Lord, *
that great is the glory of the Lord.

⁷ Though the Lord be high, he cares for the lowly; *
he perceives the haughty from afar.

⁸ Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe; *
you stretch forth your hand against the fury of my enemies;
your right hand shall save me.

⁹ The Lord will make good his purpose for me; *
O Lord, your love endures for ever;
do not abandon the works of your hands.

Alternate: Psalm 130 *De profundis*

INTRODUCTION: Psalm 130, best known by its Latin incipit *De Profundis*, "Out of the Depths," has inspired church musicians for centuries, usually in the context of a Requiem Mass. One need only mention Johan Sebastian Bach's magnificent cantata *Aus der Tiefen rufe ich, Herr, zu dir* (BWV 131) inspired by Luther's 1523 paraphrase, *Aus tiefer Not*

schrei ich zu dir, for corroboration. A cursory check, however, reveals that no fewer than thirty-six other works by major composers such as Mozart, Handel, Mendelssohn, and Schoenberg could also be cited. Psalm 130 has obviously played a major role in the Catholic and evangelical piety of the Western Church. But what accounts for this popularity?

Out of the depths have I called to you, O Lord;
Lord, hear my voice; *
let your ears consider well the voice of my
supplication.

² If you, Lord, were to note what is done amiss, *

O Lord, who could stand?

³ For there is forgiveness with you; *

therefore you shall be feared.

⁴ I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for him; *

in his word is my hope.

⁵ My soul waits for the Lord,

more than watchmen for the morning, *

more than watchmen for the morning.

⁶ O Israel, wait for the Lord, *

for with the Lord there is mercy;

⁷ With him there is plenteous redemption, *

and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins.

The Epistle: 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

³INTRODUCTION: The presence of the Spirit is a theme of the lectionary on this day. This is the Spirit of God's presence, which the text hopes for at the resurrection. It is in this Spirit that Paul speaks to the church, "I believed, and so I spoke." What is it that compels the human spirit to speak words of encouragement and healing of fractured relationship, but the Spirit of God, who seeks this reconciliation for all creation. . . . In the face of difficulties and evil, strength is found in the persistence of God's goodness and presence. "No matter how great the evil in the world, God acts persuasively upon the wreckage to bring from it whatever good is possible.

¹Therefore, since it is by God’s mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. ²We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practise cunning or to falsify God’s word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God. ³And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake. ⁶For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness’, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

⁷ But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. ⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. ¹¹For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. ¹²So death is at work in us, but life in you.

4:13-5:1

But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—‘I believed, and so I spoke’—we also believe, and so we speak, ¹⁴because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

¹⁶So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an

eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

2 Corinthians 5:1

¹ For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

The Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

The Gospel: Mark 3:20-35

³INTRODUCTION: A central theme of Mark's Gospel is how Jesus' hearers (especially the Twelve) fail to comprehend the deeper meaning of his words and actions. The wild charges made by the scribes and the apologies offered by his family in today's Gospel indicate just how misunderstood Jesus was by those closest to him: The Jesus who calls his disciples to be a united "house" and community is dismissed by his own "house" as "out of his mind." Apologizing for his exorbitant claims about himself and his challenging their most cherished traditions and revered institutions, his family attempts to bring Jesus home.

Mark 3:1-19

¹Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. ²They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. ³And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward."

⁴Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. ⁵He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

⁶The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

⁷Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; ⁸hearing all that he was

doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon.

⁹He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him; ¹⁰for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him. ¹¹Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!" ¹²But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.

¹³He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, ¹⁵and to have authority to cast out demons. ¹⁶So he appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter);

¹⁷James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); ¹⁸and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, ¹⁹and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Then he went home; (<http://bible.oremus.org>)

A reading from the Gospel of Mark 3: 20-35

The crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.' ²²And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.'

²³And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, 'How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. ²⁷But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder

his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

²⁸ ‘Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; ²⁹but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin’— ³⁰for they had said, ‘He has an unclean spirit.’

³¹ Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³²A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, ‘Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.’ ³³ And he replied, ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ ³⁴ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers!’ ³⁵Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.’

The Gospel of the Lord.
All Praise to you, Lord Christ.



The Bible texts of the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel lessons are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Church of Christ in the USA, and used by permission.

The Collects, Psalms and Canticles are from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979.

From The Lectionary Page: <http://lectionarypage.net>
and

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/lectionary/third-sunday-after-pentecost>

SOURCES:

¹The Collect [continued]

From the Gelasian sacramentary (#556) 6th to 8th centuries and the supplement to the Gregorian sacramentary (#1123) 6th century through the Sarum Missal (prior to 1549) and Books of Common Prayer to the 1962 RC Missal, this was the collect for the (equivalent of the) Sixth Sunday of Easter. The collect is also used at the 10th Sunday in Ordinary Time in The Episcopal Church (where that Sunday is called Proper 5).

<http://liturgy.co.nz/reflections/easter6>

1 Samuel 8

<https://assets.press.princeton.edu/chapters/i11219.pdf>

Genesis 3: 8-15 I find it hard to resist dwelling on the beauty of the passage about God searching for Adam and Eve “at the time of the evening breeze.” Why that narrative elaboration? I sat on the porch on this beautiful Spring evening in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where we frequently have evening breezes, and sometimes more than breezes, to discern what could be the purpose in the text telling me that God was heard walking in the garden “at the time of the evening breeze.” Often the springtime sounds so magnificently alive because we’ve grown accustomed to the silence of the winter, so the tree-frogs and insects are noticeable. The worldview of Process theology, with a strong affirmation of God’s immanence in the world, is not as threatened by the folksy picture of God walking around in the garden “in the evening breeze” as our classical theistic forebears, who certainly took issue with such a passage of scripture with a theological concept of God as utterly transcendent and impassible. In Process Theology, we proclaim the immanent God who is concerned about the whereabouts of a couple who were created free—free enough to hide from God even in the Garden of Eden.

Also, as any mention of “breeze” in the scriptures should clue us into, what is translated here might connote the same Holy Spirit that is involved in the Creation narrative in the first creation story, as well as elsewhere throughout the Bible. The Ruach, (wind, breeze, breath, Spirit) is one way that we might be able to translate the meaning of what is happening in this text to hearers of our sermon who might smirk a little at the idea of an omniscient God walking around searching for Adam and Eve. The Breeze blowing might just be one and the same of “God walking” and “God speaking” to Adam and Eve, who know they have trespassed upon God’s commandments. As Sally McFague has stated in *Models of God*, this Pneuma/Ruach/Spirit might be the best way of conceptualizing God in a way that connects humans to non-human creation (which is certainly an element of the curses that are uttered later in this passage.)

Furthermore, the fact that God is portrayed *searching* for Adam and Eve describes a divine relationship with humanity in which God is actively pursuing us. God is concerned with our well-being, our location

in life, and offering us the best possible outcome for each scenario. In this case, that scenario involves a break in trust, and therefore God describes the curse and fractured relationship that arises out of that break in trust.

<https://processandfaith.org/lectionary-commentary/the-third-sunday-after-pentecost-10-june-2018/>

Psalm 138 One theme of the texts this week is the immanence of God. “God is both transcendent over the world, but also immanent in the world” [Paul Nancarrow, *Introduction to Process Theology**]. Charles Hartshorne identified, though it is the presumption of classical theology that we need not elevate one aspect of God and denigrate the other. God mustn’t be only transcendent, but instead can be supremely transcendent and supremely immanent.

It is the Biblical witness that God is supremely immanent especially in the experience of the sufferer, the oppressed, and the desperate. “He regards the lowly, but perceives the haughty from afar.” The lowly are strengthened, the haughty are alone in their haughtiness. God’s aim is to uplift the downtrodden and “knock the mighty from their seat” as Mary later proclaims. God persuades toward an equalization of power, and locating that power within the self-perpetuating good of the universe. *[*Process Theology* envisions a universe made out of relationships and growing in creative transformation, where God is intimately involved with every creature and every creature is everlastingly cherished by God.]

<https://processandfaith.org/lectionary-commentary/the-third-sunday-after-pentecost-10-june-2018/>

Psalm 130 One reason may be its association with a sub-group of the Psalter known since the days of Augustine (354--439 CE) as the Penitential Psalms (Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). These psalms often express deep sorrow for sin and ask God for help and forgiveness. Psalm 130 encourages fervent prayer to God (verse 1) the source of forgiveness to those who wait for the Lord (verses 4--6).

https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1232

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1 <https://processandfaith.org/lectionary-commentary/the-third-sunday-after-pentecost-10-june-2018/>

Mark 3:20- The Jesus who cast out demons and cured the sick is charged with being possessed himself. The scribes cannot grasp the single-minded dedication of Jesus to the will of God without the “filters” of their interpretations and direction; hence, he must be an agent of Satan, the prince of demons. (Remember that whatever the people of Gospel Palestine could not understand or explain was considered the work of “demons.”) The Jesus who comes to be a vehicle of unity among God’s people calls on his hearers to be united in faith and spirit in him in seeking God’s will in all things. The Gospel Jesus destroys the barriers created by race, culture, wealth and social status. He speaks of a new, united human family: the family of God.

To fail or refuse to build God’s kingdom of grace is to “blaspheme” against the Spirit of God: to be so mired in cynicism and skepticism that we refuse to embrace the possibilities for realizing the hope of God’s grace. For Jesus, the crushing pessimism that God’s grace is inaccessible to us condemns us to lives of sadness and isolation, not the lives of meaning and joy God envisions for us.

<http://www.connectionsmediaworks.com/sundaygospel.html#june>

10



A STATE (UN)LIKE ANY OTHER STATE

“Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations.”

SAMUEL 8:5

The eminent Oxford philosopher Isaiah Berlin took great pleasure in telling the story of a party he attended in the 1930s where the later president of the State of Israel, Chaim Weizmann, then the leader of the World Zionist Organization, was asked by an aristocratic British lady admirer, “Dr. Weizmann, I do not understand. You are a member of the most cultured, civilized, brilliant and cosmopolitan people in history and you want to give it all up to become—Albania?” According to Isaiah Berlin, Weizmann pondered thoughtfully and slowly on the question, then his face lit up like a light bulb. “Yes!” he exclaimed: “Albania! Albania!”

To become a people like any other people! That was the idea that many Zionists had in mind when they set out to realize their project to create a Jewish state. The Declaration of

Independence* of the State of Israel internalized this notion in a central passage that stresses “the natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign State.” Jews, so their argument went, had always been the archetypal “other” in history. Only by ending the “abnormal” situation of their dispersion in a worldwide diaspora and by reestablishing their own state after two millennia would “normality” be regained in the form of a small Jewish state. Thus, the Jews would become “a nation like all other nations” and their state a state like all other states—an imagined Albania.¹

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

* The second section of The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel - one sentence long - addresses the normative aspect of Israel’s establishment: *it states that it is the natural right of the Jewish people to be like any other people, exercising self-determination in its sovereign state.*

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/analysis-of-israel-s-declaration-of-establishment>



Commentary on Psalm 138

James Limburg
Professor Emeritus of Old Testament
Luther Seminary, Saint Paul Minn.

The word "extreme" seems to be especially popular in the language of our day. One hears of extreme sports, extreme programming, and there is a band with the name "Extreme." Whatever the word means in each of these connections, "extreme" refers to something that is not bland or middle-of-the-road, but rather pushing to the limits, situated on the edges.

The Bible speaks of God in terms of extremes.

For example: God is "high above all nations" and yet is concerned about an individual poor man and childless woman (Psalm 113). God is

enthroned in heaven and yet looks down on the earth's inhabitants (Psalm 33:13). God is "high and lifted up" and yet reaches down to forgive a sinner (Isaiah 6, one of the lectionary texts for this day). God says "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit" (Isaiah 57:15). God is "Our Father who in heaven" who is concerned about our daily needs (Matthew 6:9-13).

To put it another way: according to the Bible, God is both transcendent (far away) and immanent (near at hand). This view of God in terms of extremes is expressed at the center of this psalm: "For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly..." (verse 6) and also in the final two sections of the psalm that speak of God's might (4-6a) and also his being with the individual (6b-8).

Location, Structure and Genre

Psalm 138 is the first in the final collection of eight psalms identified as "of David" in the Psalter (138-145). Psalms of thanks (138) and praise (145) frame a group of individual laments (139-144). At the heart of the *Song of Thanksgiving* is an account of God's deliverance (see 30:2, 8-12; 34:4,6; 40:1-2, etc.). The account of deliverance is very short in this psalm: "On the day I called, you answered me..." (138:3). The psalm may be divided as follows: I thank you, God (1-3), This is our God (4-6), You Are With Me (7-8).

Reading the Psalm

Thank you, Lord, from the bottom of my heart! (1-3)

The psalm gets right to the point. The first word in the Hebrew text is "I thank you." The perspective of the psalm goes to the extremes. This is no perfunctory, "Thanks, God," but a deep "thank you from the bottom of my heart" as we might put it. And this is not a solitary word of thanks to God; the psalmist wants "all the kings of the earth" to join in with him in praising God (verse 4). What is the reason for this heartfelt thanks to God? The psalm says it very simply:

On the day I called, you answered me, you increased the strength of my soul. (3)

Songs of thanksgiving such as this one typically refer to a specific action of God for which the psalmist is thankful (see Psalm 30:6-12). But here the psalmist's language is comprehensive, strong and simple: "I prayed, you answered" (verse 3).

This is our God (4-6)

Verse 6 gives succinct expression to the "extreme theology" that informs this psalm. The Lord is *high*, as high as one can imagine, even above the heavens (Psalm 113:4). The capitalized LORD indicates that the Hebrew is using the name Yahweh for God; notice that it comes up four times in this God-centered short section.

But this God is also *concerned with the lowly*. Again, the theologian behind this psalm thinks of God in "extreme" categories. For another example of this thinking in extreme terms, notice Psalm 22, where the psalmist speak of God as "holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel" (verse 3) and himself as "a worm, and not human." (verse 6).

You are with me (7-8)

The picture of life as a "walk" reminds one of Psalm 23. Psalm 138:7 says: "Though I *walk* in the midst of trouble" and Psalm 23 reads: "Even though I *walk* [same verb form in Hebrew] through the darkest valley" (Psalm 23:4). The psalm comes to a conclusion as it began, with a reference to the LORD's amazing grace or "steadfast love" (verses 8,2)

Toward a Sermon on this Psalm

The notion of God's immanence and transcendence runs through the Bible and through both Jewish and Christian theology. The important point is that the Bible and biblical theology speak of God in terms of both immanence and transcendence. If only the immanence is stressed, one ends up with pantheism (everything is God). If transcendence is over emphasized, one can slip into deism (God is very far away and not involved in things on the earth).

One can line up lists of texts that speak of God's might and power. At the other extreme is the Bible's central assertion of God's concern for humans, the earth and its creatures, in the Incarnation, God taking human form in the person of Jesus the Christ.

The challenge for the preacher/teacher is always to find fresh and effective ways of expressing immanence/transcendence. I'm suggesting that the notion of "extremes" might be helpful at this point.

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=504

THE GOSPEL OF MARK was neglected by early Christian tradition, rarely—if ever—used in preaching. The Gospel of Matthew surpassed it in both length and detail. Mark was seen as something of a poor cousin to the great Gospel of Matthew, used so consistently by the fathers of the church. Already at the turn of the first Christian century authors were citing Matthew (the *Didache* [90s C.E.], *1 Clement* [96–98 C.E.], *Barnabas* [about 110 C.E.], and Ignatius of Antioch [110 C.E.]). Toward the middle of the second century (circa 130 C.E.) Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis in South Phrygia in the province of Asia, associated the Second Gospel with a certain “Mark” and the Apostle Peter, and Clement of Alexandria located that association in the city of Rome. Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Jerome, and Tertullian agree: the Gospel of Mark appeared in Rome, and reports a Petrine story of Jesus, interpreted by his associate, Mark. But the great fathers of the church scarcely use this gospel in their writings.

Augustine articulated most clearly an understanding of the Gospel of Mark that has endured till the modern era: *Marcus eum subsequutus tamquam pedisequus et breviator eius videtur.*¹ As the emerging Christian church looked consistently to Matthew for its instruction, no commentary on the Gospel of Mark appeared until the turn of the sixth century.

From 650 to 1000 C.E. thirteen major commentaries were written on Matthew, and four on Mark. This neglect continued down to the end of the eighteenth century.² The Gospel of Mark maintained its place in the Christian canon because of its traditional relationship with Peter and the city of Rome. But it has been well described as “present but absent.”³ As the Christian church became an increasingly unified political, social, and ideological phenomenon in the early centuries, “biblical texts were not used as narratives in themselves but as sources for proofs of doctrinal and ecclesiastical positions. In this enterprise, Mark was a weak contender.”⁴

The First Gospel

Things have changed since that time, and it could be claimed that gospel scholarship over the past 150 years has been dominated by a fascination with the Gospel of Mark.⁵ The turn to the Gospel of Mark was initiated by the so-called source critics who began to question the long-held tradition that Matthew was the first of the gospels to appear. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the source critics

established the priority of Mark over Matthew and Luke. The traditional “Second Gospel” became the first gospel.

The modern era, ushered in by the Enlightenment, saw a rapid development of critical thought. The English deists, themselves products of the Enlightenment, demanded that the biblical tradition be subjected to the scrutiny of hard logic. The doublets, contradictions, and non sequiturs had to be explained.⁶ A “higher criticism” emerged, especially in Germany, but also in England and France, applying more rational criteria to biblical studies. The source critics were part of the “higher criticism.” Their work, especially that of H. J. Holtzmann,⁷ sought to establish a firm historical basis for the life of Jesus. Holtzmann argued that Mark, the most primitive of all the gospels, took us back to a reliable “framework” for the life of Jesus: Jesus’ messianic consciousness developed over a period of preaching in Galilee, and reached its high point at Caesarea Philippi. There he made known to his followers his belief that he was the expected Jewish Messiah. His journey to Jerusalem and his end there were the result of the Jewish leadership’s rejection of his claim.

Contemporary scholarship is skeptical about Holtzmann’s discovery of a framework for the life of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. But close and detailed study of the use of individual passages in each of the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) suggests that Mark’s Gospel is the most ancient. Although the so-called Synoptic Question, i.e., the order of appearance and the related question of the literary dependence of one Synoptic Gospel upon another, is still debated,⁸ the priority of Mark is the best explanation for a number of the features of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Matthew and Luke had their own sources for their accounts of the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Some material is found only in Matthew (sometimes called M; see, for example, Matt 16:16–18), or only in Luke (sometimes called L; see, for example, Luke 15:1–32). A large amount of material in both Matthew and Luke is not present in Mark (sometimes called “Q,” from the German word *Quelle*, meaning “source”; see, for example, teachings in Matt 5:1–7:28 found in Luke 6:12–49 and elsewhere in Luke, but nowhere in Mark). It appears that the authors of both Matthew and Luke had the Gospel of Mark before them as they penned their particular stories of Jesus.⁹

https://www.wtsbooks.com/common/pdf_links/9780801048418.pdf