

Proper 28, Year A
November 13, 2011
Psalm 123

You'll have to excuse me as I allow our 10-year old golden retriever Logan to teach me some more lessons about my proper relationship to God. I think Logan must be reading ahead in the lessons that are given to us on any given Sunday. He illustrates in advance the main theme of the psalm I am preparing to preach on. Logan is a lot smarter than we give him credit, Ray and I!

As the weather has gotten cooler, there seems to be fewer dog walkers around the Westville Dam area – at least at the time I have been taking Logan over there. So after the disruption and devastation of the October 29th snowstorm I've been trying an experiment at the end of our walk. For awhile after the storm, there was a huge tree blocking the path. I would climb over the trunk and Logan would very timidly scoot under it. Before I'd begin my climb over the fallen trunk, I would lob his leash under the trunk. Finally, I decided rather cautiously that I would simply unclip his leash and let him be off-leash until we returned to the car – up the long gravel hill. It's just here where the psalm comes into view.

Believe me, we've had dogs that simply would have taken off without a backward glance once I released them. We even use a leash system with Logan to insure maximum control. It's called a "gentle leader" and Logan dislikes it. Wisdom has it that the dogs who are most resistant to this type of leash are the ones who most need it. Come to think of it, my loving Guide, God has been encouraging me into such a system of guidance most of my life.

At any rate, it is Logan's behavior off-leash that so illustrates today's short psalm. Initially, he just takes off at a full gallop. The only other time he is able to run like that is when we let him out of our side rectory door for the short sprint to the car. Upon adopting him, we were told that he loves riding in cars and we have certainly found that to be true.

So, there is Logan running away from me along the road – clearly loving his freedom – tail streaming behind him – wind ruffling his golden coat – eyes forward. Free at last! Suddenly, he stops short – puts the breaks on. And then his head turns and he looks back to check that I am still behind him – not too far away – a backward glance – just to make sure.

As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters,
and the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress,
So our eyes look to the Lord our God,*
until he show us his mercy. Psalm 123:2, 3*

The two baptisms that we have and are witnessing this week and last remind me of our four children when they first were able to scouch, then crawl and walk. We were the front end of the generation that did not use a playpen for child safety issues. Once they could move at all – their movement was limited only by a closed door or gate. Mim, in particular, needed to keep me in her sight lines. Not even Ray was a good stand-in for me, believe it or not. Even at almost 31-years old, of the four adult children, Mim is the one who is checking in – either by phone, e-mail or text message.

So, verse one presented itself as an invitation from God – who really wants to be present and available to us. Am I able to say along with the psalmist ...

To you I lift up my eyes,
to you enthroned in the heavens. Psalm 123:1*

My understanding of God's location is not the same as the psalmist. I believe that God, the Holy Spirit dwells in a way that is a mystery to me – in and around me. The question I ask myself is how ready am I to trust the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit? Reflecting on the behavior of our children and observing the present behavior of Logan – can they teach me their instinctive wisdom about exactly where and in whom reliable, everlasting safety can be found? When and more especially why did I ever feel that I didn't need to "lift up my eyes" to God, who created me in the first place and who loves me so very much.

Ray and I and others who have joined us Monday through Friday for Morning Prayer here at church have been very blessed by beginning our day in worship. It is just the reminder that I need that I am a dependent child of God. At the beginning of each day I need to tune into God's will for my day. Often I hear His will spoken to me in the words of Holy Scripture. The action that I must take is to show up and listen. A worshipping community is a tremendous encouragement. I hear God's words of guidance much easier and more clearly with fellow travelers on this journey called life.

My attentiveness to God speaking through Scripture is seconded by our opening prayer this morning. It is one of my favorites.

Blessed Lord who caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them ..

So, I leave you with these two images that have helped me remember how God wants me to relate and place my trust in Him. God wants to guide and bless me during rainy days and sunny days.

I notice how Teddy & Colleen DeMings look at Eileen and Dave; how Emily Bousquet regards Heather and Ryan. What can we learn from them about our relationship with God?

And then, I return to the instinctive wisdom of Logan who simply adores being off-leash and running free, but is periodically checking in to locate the whereabouts of Ray and me.

Dear loving Father,
who created us in love and for love,
Thank you for showing us the wisdom of babies and an old dog
that leads us to rekindle our love for and trust in your loving guidance.
Amen.