

Soul Satisfied

Psalm 63:1-8

O God, you *are* my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land
where there is no water.

So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.

Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.

So I will bless you as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.

My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips
when I think of you on my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.

My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

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March 23, 2025

Rev. Michael Catanzaro

I.

Folks, by way of fair warning, today we begin a six week mad dash to May. In this period of time we will have two Baptisms beginning with Maryanne this morning, celebrate Communion twice, ordain and install Deacons and Elders, undertake the All-Church Read, gather for the annual Women's Worship and name the 2025 Women of the Year, make the walk through Holy Week beginning with waving our fronds and shouting Hosanna! on Palm Sunday, gather with solemnity in our upper room for the Maundy Thursday service, welcome Easter morning with our Alleluias (start thinking about the Easter Bonnet you'll be wearing), hold two Session meetings, undertake our Spring Rummage Sale, put out two newsletters, see the Deacons meet, hold a worship service at Partridge Knoll and, if you wish, have a potluck brunch following worship on Palm Sunday. For most churches, this level of activity would be as a dream come true, here on the Park is it business as usual.

II.

Given what awaits us, I thought that today we would endeavor to keep it simple and straightforward (and short, hopefully) by focusing our attention on the *feel* of our faith. I have been holding on to the genesis of this sermon since February 4th (which seems long ago) when Anna and Maryanne Eller came to my office for a chat. In a congregation just chock full of busy bees, Anna and James are among our busiest.

It was a great privilege to officiate their wedding on September 5th, 2020 as they embarked on an incredible journey together; both as a family, and as a wonderful part of our church family. In less than five years, the Ellers have purchased, fixed up, and settled two homes, and amassed 5 children; with *four* of them under the age of 10. (How 'bout dem apples?). While not quite Carol, Mike and their bunch of six kids, Anna and James are doing all of this without the help of Alice the Housekeeper.

III.

Within moments of sitting down on the sofa and beginning our chat, Anna asked if I would like to hold Maryanne? Before I could even utter a response Anna had stood up, walked over to me, and sat Maryanne down on my thigh. With her back and head supported against my right arm, I moved my left hand over her tummy to keep her from sliding off my lap. While a rather simple and straightforward position, it caused me to tumble (metaphorically) headlong down the rabbit hole. Maryanne's belly fit *perfectly* in my hand. It was neither too big nor too small, but *just right*. I mean, I *had* her; and, as it turned out, she had *me*. It was an incredibly wonderful and satisfying experience. So much so, that I confess it required a fair bit of concentration to focus on what Anna was saying because all I wanted to do at that moment was hold *this* particular child of God forever, and move my hand around that tiny belly of hers.

IV.

Now, Anna is a smart cookie, we *all* know this, James is not the only one in the loop. While some might have seen her offer of holding Maryanne as a product of pretty much having a kid in her arms for almost a decade now, I knew there was more to the gesture. She was well aware, I am sure, that I would soon be entering a new phase in my life. While I certainly did my fair share of baby holding back in the day, she was correct in surmising it had been awhile since I had held such a little bugger. Anna was giving me the opportunity to get my grandparent game on, and to do so with a kid whose head was slightly less floppy in comparison to the one I would next be holding.

In hindsight, she was absolutely correct and had provided me a real gift. Not only did she prime my grandfatherly pump, but she and Maryanne got me started down the road that is today's sermon. A sermon I would deliver on the same morning we have welcomed Maryanne Grace Eller into the body of Christ, and the life of this church family.

V.

Over the course of the past couple of weeks both sets of grandparents (Duncan and Sarah, and Linda and I) have made the 9 hour trek to Maine to visit young Alistair, now one month old. There are two things which have really struck me during these first first four weeks of his life. The first is the

amazing support Chris and Nicole have received from this congregation. As grandparents, the four of us would like to thank everyone for their kindness. We are humbled and deeply grateful.

The other thing that strikes me is that just about everyone keeps asking some variation of the very same question, “How did it *feel* to hold your grandson?” My initial response to this query is, “Surprisingly heavy.” I mean, he is a big kid; relatively speaking. When first in your arms he is, of course, a bundle of joy (though perhaps not so little). After ten minutes or so, however, you are looking for a better place to sit, and more support to help you hold him. The first thing I felt was the weight, substance, and *realness* of what had only been an idea for a great many months now. One also feels these short little breaths, and his tiny chest rising and falling as he sleeps on your chest or shoulder. Then there is the hair as you hold his head, all soft and wispy. Another thing you feel is his utter reliance for everything all the time from those who love him.

VI.

While all of this is true, what I think people are actually asking me is how do you feel *emotionally* when you hold him? Speaking as but one grandparent I can tell you I feel a great mix of emotions arising out of every area of my life. I feel hope and joy, but also fear and trepidation. I feel great relief and profound gratitude. I feel overwhelmed both in knowing what lies ahead for him, and in not knowing what the world that awaits him will be like. I feel awe. I feel my own mortality. I feel love. As a parent I feel proud of a job well done. As a grandparent I feel the return of a never-ending sense of responsibility. I feel so many things and, yet, I don't really know *how* I feel or how I *should* feel. There is one feeling, though, on which I am absolutely clear and of which I am most certain.

VII.

Today's scripture reading comes to us from The Book of Psalms. A collection of 150 ancient Hebrew poems, songs, and prayers, the “Psalter” serves as both a “songbook” and a “prayer book” for the Israelites. One which expresses a wide range of emotions and experiences arising out of their relationship with God. If we seek to understand the *feel* of our faith, there is no better place to begin than the Psalms; particularly one such as the 63rd, our sermon text for today.

Including the 63rd, there are 73 psalms attributed to David (whether he actually wrote them or not is different matter). Broadly speaking, there are six general types of psalms: praise, lament, thanksgiving, wisdom, royal, and imprecatory (which wish woe upon one's enemies). The 63rd Psalm is considered a specialized Psalm of Thanksgiving. Specifically, it is a Psalm of trust. "O God, YOU *are* my God," says the Psalmist, "I seek you, my soul *thirsts* for YOU." The author has come to understand and accept an *utter* reliance on God for *everything* ALL the time.

VIII.

Today we begin the second half of Lent, traditionally understood as 40 days of preparation for the arrival of Easter, the moment in the liturgical year which both gives rise to our faith and defines our faith. While much attention is rightly given during this season to the theological ramifications of the cross in order that we might more fully grasp how Jesus' death upon it serves as an atonement for sin (cosmic and individual) relatively little attention is paid to how our faith *in* such a gracious and loving act should leave us to *feel*.

Our faith certainly creates a great mix of emotions. The Good Friday type of fear and trepidation. The hope and joy of Easter morning. A great relief and a profound gratitude, that God should so love the world. An overwhelming feeling of uncertainty when considering what the cross means for our future, and for the future of the world. Feelings of awe, of mortality, and of love. Feelings of gratitude for a job well done, and a growing sense of our own responsibility in having received such a gift.

IX.

The truth is, our faith evokes a *great* many feelings in us. Most of which we hold in some kind of garbled tension until they, inevitably, come spilling out of us at different and various times in our lives in ways we can seldom control. This is only natural and to be expected. While our faith certainly provides us a certain *intellectual* comfort, we tend to linger too long in that place like Mary Magdalene outside the empty tomb. We get stuck on the *idea* of a soul saved, rather than exploring the *feelings* that salvation brings to one's soul.

Historically, the Presbyterian response to this has been to simply not feel very much at all. Hence the moniker the Frozen Chosen. Some religious traditions advocate for a rapturous and demonstrable aura, as if the real work

of the Cross was to let others know how happy it makes you to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior so they will do the same. Then there are still other traditions which acknowledge the feelings of faith, but fear them to be the Devil's workshop.

X.

However narrow the gate might be, I am holding out for the sweet-spot which I believe lies somewhere between feeling everything all the time and hardly feeling anything ever, has quite a bit more weight and substance than mere happiness, and is not something about which one should be fearful. I believe we have happened upon such a spot, and it was Maryanne, Alistair, and the author of the 63rd Psalm which have shown us the way. Our faith should *feel* as a Soul Satisfied.

Here in today's sermon text we find a person in a *very* difficult and trying place in their life, likened to a dry and weary land where there is no water. While we might imagine there are many things for which a person in such a situation might find themselves praying, the Psalmist is seeking *just* enough to satisfy the soul. It is Baby Bear's share: neither too big nor too small, neither too hard nor too soft, neither too hot nor too cold, but *just right* so as to see us through our days as well as the watches of the night.

XI.

Like a baby on one's shoulder or resting upon a knee, a Soul Satisfied is one which trusts in an *utter* reliance on God for *everything* ALL the time. The feeling of faith is the sensation of God's hand upon us rubbing our belly and holding us near with head safely secured. The feeling of faith is that of r-e-l-a-x-i-n-g into one's life so as to be able to sing for joy, feast at the table, and behold the power and glory of God without fear or trepidation. The feeling of faith is knowing God *has* us in the palm of His hand; the itty-bitty baby, you and me my sisters and brothers, and the whole world as well. The feeling of faith has a weight and a substance to it which serves to make God *real* to us, and for us. And, the feeling of faith is that which allows us to truly believe that the cross of Christ has satisfied the cost and consequences of sin so that every soul might yet live.

XII.

Today, our church has accepted both the privilege of, and the responsibility for the care and nurture of Maryanne Grace Eller as we welcome her with joy into the body of Christ having Baptized her in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Let us help her not only to *learn* of our faith, but also to *feel* such a faith within herself that she might come to truly know and believe that in each and every moment of this mad dash through life she, too, is a child of God and an heir to the Kingdom.

Jesus loves us, this we know. For the Bible tells us so. Little ones to Him belong. They are weak but he is strong. Yes, that Jesus loves us is not some dream we hope to come true, it is business as usual. Amen.