

**Psalm 34:1-8**

**Revelation 19:4-8**

**June 7, 2009**

**Creekside COB**

**“Worship for all of us”**

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**You might be wondering what these two texts -- Psalm 34 and Revelation 19 -- have to do with one another. After all, they come from quite different parts of the Bible, and are quite different kinds of biblical literature: Psalms was the prayer book of the Hebrew people -- a collection of prayers and songs to be used in personal and public worship, written hundreds of years before Jesus lived. Revelation is an apocalyptic vision of the end times, written to Christians within a hundred years or so after Christ’s death. These are not texts that are ever paired in any lectionary cycle, and I confess that trying to make them work together has been challenging, a conundrum which is even more troubling since I was the one who selected them, so I have no one to blame but myself.**

**One reason I chose these texts is because this is worship recognition Sunday, and I think these each have something to say -- separately and together -- about worship. I believe that worship recognition is important: there are many folks here at Creekside who share their time and their talent week after week, serving as ushers, greeters, storytellers, acolytes, musicians, and worship leaders -- some of you who do several of these things, sometimes on the same Sunday. We are certainly grateful for the time and thoughtfulness and scholarship which Pastor David brings to the worship planning, preparation, and preaching he does every week; all of these things are gifts to this congregation. In the past we have asked those folks to stand so they can be recognized. I’m not going to do that this morning, even**

though I, and Maryann Zerbe, and others who serve on the Worship Team appreciate you, and I know others in the congregation do too. But I'm not going to recognize you individually for two reasons: first of all, because I'm afraid I'll leave someone out, and second of all, because that's not the kind of worship recognition I want to talk about. That kind of worship recognition -- when we recognize each other's contributions -- is important, but it is not where worship recognition begins. We need to begin by recognizing who it is that we worship, and why. If we don't have that clear at the beginning, then the other stuff isn't relevant, because it isn't focused in the right place. That is where Psalms and Revelation come in.

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament are records of God interacting with God's people -- through mighty deeds and miracles, like delivering the Hebrews from Egypt and parting the Red Sea, and also in less dramatic ways, like letting an old couple know they are finally going to have a son, or providing food in the wilderness every day for forty years. Later believers were able to hear from God through the life and teachings of God's son, Jesus, and by witnessing through the power of the Holy Spirit. The extraordinary thing about all of these interactions is that they are never a one-way conversation. God speaks to us, but we are invited -- actually, we are commanded -- to talk back. Prayer is one way we do this; worship is another. "Praise the Lord" is not just an expression; it's an order. It's exactly the same kind of imperative sentence as "Have no other gods before me," or "Do not kill."

The Hebrew authors of Psalms would have had an acute sense of God's commands in the Law or Torah, but it would have been quite different than what many of us think of today. We tend to think of the Law as a set of rules that we have to follow, whether we like it or not, and frankly it can be kind of hard sell to non-Christians, who see Christianity as a bunch of rules and Christians as a bunch of hypocrites who talk about the rules on Sunday and break them along with everyone else on Monday. This understanding of the law can reduce living a Christian life to doing stuff we have to because God said so, and if we mess up we'll get in really big trouble, if not in this

life, than certainly in the next. There is not a lot of joy in that kind of law. The Jews had a different sense of Torah. What we translate as "Law" they would be more likely to call "Gracious Instruction." Notice it is not "gracious suggestions;" it is still binding for God's people, only, it's kind of fun. Following God's instructions, which include praising God, is something you actually *want* to do. It isn't a duty that priests or other religious folks do on your behalf so that you don't have to waste your time with it, or risk getting struck by lightning because you did it wrong. Wouldn't it be a welcoming message to invite people to joy rather than duty? Following the Law -- especially giving praise to God, the source of all good things, including the Law -- is for everyone. If I had begun this sermon by recognizing all the people who have contributed to worship at Creekside, I would have had to recognize all of you. Worship Team is grateful for those of you who step up and fill specific roles, but worship is for all of us. When any one of you is missing from our worship service, the entire body is diminished in some way.

That brings me to another way in which worship is for all of us. All of us can be a collective noun phrase referring to the entire gathered body of Christ. But all of us also means our entire selves: body, mind, and spirit. Worship is not just for our intellect, or our emotions, or coming to church to take up space in a pew. Worship is something that should engage our thoughts, feelings, and all our senses, all directed toward God. The author of Psalm 34 understood this, and used a wonderful metaphor to describe his joy and delight in God : "O taste and see the Lord is good!" Although worship, like making a good meal, may take effort, it should be something we offer to God with joy. Psalm 34 begins "I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall continually be in my mouth." The author of Psalm 19 compared the law to the most valuable and sweetest things he could think of: "the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb." Worship is something to be enjoyed and savored. God's word is something which we are invited to take in and make a part of ourselves and everything we do. Eugene Peterson, translator of *The Message Bible* and author of *Eat This Book*, writes "Reading is an

**immense gift, but only if the words are assimilated, taken into the soul -- eaten, chewed, gnawed, received in unhurried delight.”**

**Our worship should be cause for delight, but it is even more than that. It is the food that sustains us as God’s people: we not only live to eat, but we eat to live. Besides being about worship, another thing the Psalm and the Revelation texts have in common is that they were both written for people who were in trouble. We don’t know the specific situation of Psalm 34, but the psalmist writes, “I sought the LORD, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD, and was saved from every trouble.” We do know that in 586 BCE the Jewish people were taken into exile and their Temple was demolished. In the absence of the Temple and far from home in a hostile country, these psalms are what sustained them, kept their faith alive, and kept their identity as God’s people until they could return to Israel generations later. The situation in Revelation was even more dangerous: a remnant group of Christians was being persecuted and killed by order of the Roman emperor. They were a community in danger not only of losing their religion and identity, but their very lives. And what does God give them to defend themselves against the most powerful empire in the world? Armies of angels? Nope. Swords? Nope. Political protest? Not a chance. God gives them the gift of worship: praise, joy, and blessing. This worship is directed to a bloody little lamb who has already been killed for their sake, and who will ultimately defeat the great Beast of the Roman Empire. It is not only the praise of these persecuted believers which goes up to God, but the praise of the whole great multitude of all those, great and small, who have gone before them. Praise is the food that sustains God’s people when we are being starved by the world; worship is what preserves our identity as God’s people. It connects us to God and to other believers in our age, ages past, and the age that is to come.**

**Praise is certainly something we should offer to God when life is going smoothly; but there are people in this congregation who have sustained their faith through heartbreaking situations who will tell you that praise is even more important when life is tough and the future is**

**uncertain. Practicing praise, blessing, and joy is not a denial that life can be difficult or that we face challenges as individuals and as the body of Christ. Praise, blessing, and joy are Christian practices that feed us, mind, body, and spirit. Praise, blessing, and joy are our way of proclaiming that God is greater than whatever the world throws at us, and that our God loves us and that love sustains us in times of trouble. We worship that God, and proclaim with joy that God not only is good; God is delicious. This is the worship I want to recognize today; this is worship for all of us. Halleluiah! Amen.**