

The Fountain of Life

Scripture: Psalm 36:9a

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**October 9, 2011
Morning Service**

People of God: For this morning, I wanted to find a text that gave thanks to God for the life that he has given us. It needed to focus on God, because on this Thanksgiving Day weekend, we need to be reminded that our thanksgiving needs to be directed towards God. Thanksgiving Day was intended to be more than just an occasion to enjoy a big meal shared with family. Thanksgiving Day was instituted as an official holiday—a holy day—in order to give thanks to our Creator for all the blessings that he has given us. That’s why we have worship again tomorrow morning.

But the particular blessing I wanted to give thanks for, this morning, is the blessing of life. After all, this morning we have witnessed the baptism of Harper Bonnie. This newborn baby, well maybe—not so much newborn anymore—but still quite young and new to her parents—this baby is a reminder of life in this creation. And baptism is a reminder of the new life that we can have in Jesus Christ. Life is foundational to all the blessings for which we need to give thanks to the Lord our God.

As I was searching for a text that focused on God for the life he has given to us, I came across Psalm 36 verse 9: For with you is the fountain of life. I knew I had found my text, as this verse clearly directs us to God for the life that we have in this world.

(Now as I began to read this Psalm and reflect upon it, especially on verse 9, I wondered why I had never preached on this Psalm before. But then I discovered, I had—just two years ago. It was for Cadet Sunday and then we focused on the second half of this verse: In your light we see light. You might remember that sermon as I one in which I talked about listening to rap music and told the story of the boy soldier Emmanuel Jal.

As I re-read that sermon, I realized how completely different this sermon will be—just by focusing on different lines of verse 9. That’s not

surprising. As one older commentator wrote on this verse—and quoted by many others afterwards: “These are some of the most wonderful words in the OT. Their fullness of meaning no commentary can ever exhaust.” Indeed, two very different sermons will not exhaust the depth of this Psalm.)

“For with you is the fountain of life.”

Life. The very fact that at this precise moment that I can take a breath. [Take a breath] It’s as basic as that. It’s as essential as that. I have life. And so do you. So does Harper. A baby always reminds us of life, of the preciousness of life. Too often we take life for granted. But when it is threatened by a close call while driving or disease raises its ugly head, then we appreciate how fragile and precious life is. But those are negative situations. It’s the arrival of a baby that offers a positive reminder about the blessings and joys of life. Holding a newborn is such a powerful testimony about the preciousness of life.

And this life, our life, is lived in the context of the living creation. The creation is full of life. The plants and the animals, not only help sustain our life, but in themselves, they have life. The creation is full of life.

That’s why I’m glad we have these large, open windows that remind us of the creation in which we live. Okay, maybe this side isn’t the best view—too much asphalt. But this side, with the green pastures and at times the cows nearly by the windows—well, it’s a great reminder of the creation in which we live. Of course, hopefully in worship you’re not gazing too much out the windows, but it is a reminder of the bounty of life in the created order.

Life. “For with you is the fountain of life.” The Psalmist recognizes that God is the source of all life. From the cry of the newborn baby to the mooing of the cows in the fields, God is the source of life. After all, God is the Creator.

But that description of God as the Creator is meant, not only to describe the original activity of God in forming and shaping this world, it is meant to describe God’s on-going work in sustaining and upholding this creation. Too often, we limit the creating work of God to the original creation, but we believe that the creation is dependent every moment upon the Creator.

As a result, all life is dependent upon our God. Life in the creation—all plants and animals. But especially, human life. Humanity is a special creation of God. As Genesis 2:7 describes it: “The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being.”

While that describes the original creation of man, it expresses a truth that applies to all human life. God has given life to each one of us. As Psalm 139 expresses it, words I often recite when visiting parents of newborns:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. (vs 13-14)

Every human being is a creation of God. That includes Harper. That includes you and me. That includes even those who do not believe in God. God has given to each one of us life.

“For with you is the fountain of life.” I like the image that is used here to describe how God gives us life. The image of a fountain. It's expresses more than that God merely is the source of our life, or that God gives us life; it's that God gives life abundantly, richly, overflowing—like a fountain.

After all, a fountain offers a continuous flow of water. Let's not think of our man-made fountains, like we have in the hall. They only provide water when we push the button. They didn't have those kinds of fountains in the days of the Psalmist. Instead, he would be thinking of a spring of water that gushes water all the time. Then add to the picture, a dry, desert like landscape—which is typical of the region. A fountain of water in that environment was crucial to life—for the plants, the animals, and for humans.

“For with you is the fountain of life.” God is not stingy when it comes to giving us life. He gives us each breath. He gives us the plants and the animals. He gives us the resources and blessings of the creation. We have life and we have it abundantly.

But. Yes, there has to be a “but”. But this abundant life we have from God is experienced and lived in a broken, sinful world. While verse 9 may be “some of the most wonderful words of the OT”, its opening words may be some of the more somber and depressing words of the OT. Because they describe sinful humanity, apart from the grace and mercy of God.

It's not a pretty picture. In contrast to the light and life of verse 9, it describes humanity in darkness, leading ultimately to death. While death may not be mentioned in those verses, the description of the wicked, who has no fear of God, who commits himself to a sinful course of action, is a description of someone who is heading towards eternal death.

And while that might not be pleasant picture to face, it is important hold on to this contrast between the description of sinful humanity, apart from God, of verses one to four to this wonderful description of verse 9, for two reasons.

First of all, it reveals the utter necessity of God. It is God and God alone who can change the condition of humanity from the despair and doom

of the opening verses to the joy and blessings of verse 9. And indeed, God has changed the condition of humanity. That's why God sent his Son Jesus Christ into the world.

It's not surprising that the Gospel of John describes Jesus as the one who gives life. In the opening prelude, John declares: "Through him [Jesus] all things were made that has been made. In him was life and that life was the light of men." (vs 3-4a) Later on, Jesus himself would say to the Samaritan woman at the well: "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks from the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed the water I give him will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (4:14)

And so, in Jesus we have the foundation of life that overcomes the darkness and death described in the opening verses of this Psalm. In Jesus, we are promised eternal life. That's the promise shown to us this morning with the waters of baptism.

Second, we need this contrast between verses one to four and verse 9 so that we will indeed give thanks to the Lord our God for life and for eternal life in Jesus Christ. It's so easy to take life for granted. It's easy to take our salvation for granted. But when we see them in contrast to the brokenness and sinfulness of our world, then indeed we will come in thanksgiving before our God.

"For with you is the fountain of life." This morning we give thanks to God for the life of Harper that the Lord has given to Mike and Amy. This morning we give thanks to the Lord for the eternal life promised to us through the waters of baptism. And tomorrow, we gather again with songs and acts of Thanksgiving for all the blessings of the Lord. For with him is the fountain of life.