

“Percolating the Scriptures”

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Psalms 1

September 5, 2021

Joyful is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the Instruction of the Lord,
and who meditates on his Instruction day and night.
That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers.

Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff that the wind blows away.
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

Adapted from the New International Version

Call it the “Principle of Absorption.” The sort of life you end up living, depends on those around you. Maybe like a virus? But masking, hand-washing, and vaccinations, vital for stopping Covid, won't help with this.

Walk beside the wicked, line up with those going the wrong way, pull up at the table of mockers. . . . You'll absorb their way of live. It might work for you, for a while. But like chaff left over after the harvest, it won't hold up when the wind comes.

So socially-distance from them. Instead, live in a different companion.

*Joyful is the one whose delight is in the Instruction of GOD,
and who digs into GOD's Instruction 24/7.*

Hang around with God, and absorb what God says. This is the wisdom this Psalm gives.

Sounds boring? Not quite the life of the party? Fanatical even?

But Jesus! He feasted on God's word, and sunk himself into the scriptures. But more than the life of the party, Jesus is Life itself! Fanatical, yes he is . . . about love. The most un-religious were drawn to him. So maybe there is something to this.

II

The Psalm says that if you live like this—absorbing God's Word and Way—you're like a tree planted by streams of water. You fill with leaves and bear fruit. Not like chaff tossed on the wind, you are deeply rooted, sturdy against the storm.

To get into the tree, the water from the living streams nearby percolates. It moves through the tiny particles that make up the soil. If the particles are too large, stony, the water percolates too quickly. The soil won't hold it long enough for the tree to absorb. The percolation cannot be rushed.

You know what else percolates. Coffee!

Pour hot water through the grounds. It absorbs oils that's been released from the beans by the roasting and grinding. Do it right and, to my taste, it's delightful. But if the beans are too coarse, the water percolates too quickly, and absorbs nothing. So not too fast. Just right.

III

Back to the Psalm. We're like the tree, absorbing the life-giving water of God's Instruction, God's Word, the Way for Life.

The Hebrew word is *Torah*. *Torah* is God's Instruction for God's People.¹

For us following of Jesus, his *Torah* includes all the Scriptures he knew—the Jewish Bible, for us the Older or First Testament— as well as what he taught and did (the Gospels), and the wisdom and practices of his first disciples (the rest of our New Testament). Jesus' *Torah* is written in our Bible.

So, let me do a riff on Psalm 1:

*You are living a good life when you delight in the Torah of Jesus,
and are absorbing it all the time.
You are like a tree growing by a stream, bearing fruit in your life,*

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torah>. It can also refer to the entirety of Jewish teaching, culture and practice derived from the Scriptures and rabbinical teachings.

*as you absorb the Scriptures,
as God's Word percolates through you,
not too fast, just right.*

IV

Normally in our worship times, we have a Bible reading or maybe two. Like today, Psalm 1. Then I guide us through thinking about it and, I hope, we hear what God is saying to us. Then the next week, we have a different text to hear and absorb.

What if it percolates by, too quickly for us to absorb?

This Fall, we're going to try something. Slow it down. Like water percolating through good soil or ground coffee, we're going to let a Bible passage seep through us. Not for one Sunday only, but over 3 weeks.

The 1st week, we'll **LISTEN**. We'll hear the passage a few times. Maybe in different translations. Maybe with some guiding questions and prompts to help us listen. Maybe with images to look at. I might share some background info that will help us get into the text, but not too much. We'll have silence, time for reflecting and absorbing. We'll let it percolate, and start tasting what God has for us.

Week 2. We've had 7 days for the story seep into us. Now we'll do some **LEARNING**. I'll give a more typical reflection on the same passage. I'll pass on insights wise people have had about it, maybe even some of my own. Not to tie it all up in a finished package, but to let it percolate more in the days to come.

The 3rd Sunday is about **RESPONDING**. That's you: your responses, your reflections. During this percolation, what has the story been doing in you? Better, what has God been doing in you?

I got this percolation idea from a colleague. John Wray serves a congregation in Nova Scotia. They've been trying this approach for a while. Folks there have responded with things like: sharing a song that connects, or a piece of art, or telling their own stories that the passage has brought out of them, or things God has been doing in their lives. Some have shared their creativity: art, poetry, music, whatever. Whatever God's Word has been percolating into them.

I'll be asking you to pass on your "RESPONDINGS" to me before that Sunday. I'll be like a curator, gathering them together to share with us all.

V

Here, then, is a bit of a preview of our worship this Fall. All these services will be online and, when we can and hopefully very soon, in-person in both our Elora UC and Bethany UC sanctuaries. You'll be able to take part however works best for you.

For the next 3 weeks, we'll be LISTENING, LEARNING, and RESPONDING to a story from the prophet Ezra. I've never dug into Ezra before, so I'm curious. One particular episode in that book might resonate with our own experiences as we return to our church buildings.

The next cycle of LISTENING, LEARNING, and RESPONDING will start October 3. That's World Communion Sunday, and we'll need to figure out how in-person Communion might happen safely. The next Sunday is Thanksgiving, and the story for this 3-week cycle is about gratitude.

The next 2 Sundays will be different. October 24 we'll mark our congregations' anniversaries: Bethany's 178th and Elora's 186th. October 31 is All Soul's Day, and we'll have our annual Memorial Sunday. I think it will be especially important this year, as we remember gratefully and with grief people who have died. Too often we haven't been able to grieve for them together. I hope we can do this, and bring some healing.

Then one more LISTENING, LEARNING, and RESPONDING cycle in November. Then, the Advent season . . . which I don't want to think about yet!

Of course, these are just plans. You know what we've been learning about plans!

VI

Let me finish by bringing us back to this 1st Psalm.

It urges you to live a life open to your Source, our Creator. You are truly alive, you are fruitful, you are rooted and nourished, not based on the circumstances around you, but by God who made you, saves you, leads you, and loves you.

If you are attuned to God's Way, if you are absorbing the Torah of Jesus, then as the Holy Spirit percolates Jesus through you, you flourish with life.

And how joyful it is, when we can do this together . . . physically-distanced maybe, but

still together. Amen.