

Edina Morningside Community Church
United Church of Christ
Rev. Howard Bell
Wednesday, July 8, 2015
Closed Minds

I want to lift up two phrases from today's Old Testament text. The first phrase is the one word, "Selah" (Psalm 48:8). which we were told in the reading means, "Stop and Listen". The second phrase is "*It is God who makes Zion secure forever.*" (Psalm 48:8).

The interpretation of this word – Selah – is also based on the role it has in music. It denotes that there is a pause. A pause in music can be just as powerful as any word that is sung. It allows us to breathe. It calls us more fully into the present. It announces the importance of the words that follow. The words that follow in today's text are these: "*O God, we meditate on you love in your temple.*" (Psalm 48: 9)

So it is in life. In our busy lives, it can be difficult to stop. I remember one quote shared by the founder of the Renewing Life program, Ingrid Dilley. She said, "*We often get caught up in doing rather than being. We do...do... do... Then we get stuck in the "doo doo" of life. We need to stop doing and just be.*"¹ The psalmist inserts this instruction – Selah - to stop and listen – in order to encourage us to just be fully present in the moment and then to hear the important words that follow.

The second phrase I am lifting us is: "*It is God who makes Zion secure forever.*" (Psalm 48:8) Since Zion refers to God's dwelling place, let us substitute the word, Zion, with God's dwelling place that is Edina Morningside Church. Then we can say, "It is God who makes Edina Morningside church secure forever." I hope this phrase opens your mind. Opens your mind about how you see the history of Edina Morningside Church. Opens your mind about how you dare to dream a more-vital and creative future for Edina Morningside Church. Opens your mind to the kind of powerful part you can play in this Interim Ministry time. Opens your mind to who God is calling us to be.

It is so easy to keep our minds closed. Our minds are closed when we see only the problems we have faced in the past, that we face today and project they we will continue to face into the future. Our minds are closed when we neglect the physical needs of our building including deferred maintenance. Our minds are closed when we fear the inevitability of change. Our minds are closed when we cling to old ways of doing ministry, old ways of governing ourselves, and old ways of being church.

During our Interim Ministry Time together, it is good for us to reflect on how much we trust God with our security, our future. Can we confidently say that we place the security of this faith community into God's hands? I do not mean to imply that by placing our security

¹ Heard during Renewing Life session co-facilitated with Ingrid at Pathways.

into God's hands, we are relieved of our responsibility of doing the work; of taking on leadership roles and decision-making; of proclaiming our faith to a world in need, and of giving of our time, talent and resources to provide concretely for the security of Edina Morningside Church. But I do mean to say, that placing God at the center of all that we have done, of all that we are doing, and of all that we shall do into the future, is just as important as the concrete steps we take together. Let me repeat that. I do mean to say, that placing God at the center of all that we have done, of all that we are doing, and of all that we shall do into the future, is just as important as the concrete steps we take together.

We are close minded if we, as a faith community do not put our trust in God more than in ourselves; if we, as a faith community, do not desperately seek to grow in our faith in God; if we as a faith community do not seek to share the gospel of Jesus; if we, as a faith community, do not love and care for one another; if we, as a faith community, do not seek to bring justice to all God's children in the world; then there is no need for God to be at our center.

But if can open our minds ant place God at our center, there is nothing that we cannot do.

This is the lesson found throughout the Old Testament and in today's Old Testament lesson. God is the center of the faith for the people of Israel. God must be at the center of our faith as the community of Edina Morningside Church.

The same message - *"It is God who makes Zion secure forever."* (Psalm 48:8) is true if we think of ourselves, our own hearts, our own minds, as a dwelling place for God. Then we can substitute our own name of Zion in this scripture passage and proclaim: *"It is God who makes Howard secure forever."* (Psalm 48:8)

Substitute your own name...*"It is God who makes...secure forever."* (Psalm 48:8)

Selah

I ask you to open your minds to what might happen in your lives if God were truly placed at the center of your lives. I am confident that it is true for many of you, that you have placed God at the center of your live, or certainly true for the many times in your lives when you have felt God's presence and heard God's still-speaking voice. You are an active participant in this faith community - this evening in our time of worship - because you placed God at the center of your lives this day. But I am also certain that there are many times in my life and in your lives when God seems to not be present, seems distant to us, seems not to be responding to our cries, to our prayers; and where doubt overcomes our faith. It is during these times, that we seek to reap the rewards of our faith and of our spiritual practices. It is at these times when we need to hear "Selah".

Selah

If God were at the center of our lives, there would be enough time in our lives for all the things we consider important - for our spiritual practices, for our family time, for meaningful work, for engaging in this faith community in powerful ways, for all the

ultimate concerns and desires we have in our own minds and in our hearts. God's time is not our time. When we are open minded to God's time, we can be transformed. If God were at the center of our lives, we would live more fully in the present moment without worry and anxiety over the future. If God were at the center of our lives, we would feel loved and we would be constantly increasing our capacity to extend our love to others in meaningful and authentic ways.

Our New Testament lesson for today tells us of a time when Jesus may have even felt close-minded to those who rejected him. After the people of his hometown reject him, we hear these words from Jesus: "*Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.*"

Biblical commentator, Beverly Zink-Sawyer, says: "*Here again, however, we are reminded of the reality of Jesus' humanity. Just as Jesus struggled against temptation in the desert at the beginning of his ministry and against the reality of his fate in the Garden of Gethsemane at the end of his ministry, here he struggles with the limitations of his full humanity: being rendered powerless by those who doubt his calling. But Jesus' powerlessness is not primarily about him but about us: about those who are unwilling to believe the great things God can do.*"²

If it was true for Jesus, it is even more true for ourselves. We can often feel close-minded to those people in our lives who have rejected us, or criticized us, or judged us. But it is by placing God at the center of our lives, where God can open our minds to the possibilities of transformed relationships. It is God who can heal our past wounds. It is God who can bring us into the present with hope.

Our New Testament lesson for today does not end with Jesus feeling powerless. It tells us of Jesus sending out his disciples to follow in his ministry.

Psalm 48 ends in with this verse:

*Walk throughout Zion – make the rounds and count the towers!
Ponder its ramparts, examine its citadels,
so that you can tell a future generation
that God is our God, forever and ever –
And God will guide us even to our last day.*

So it is with our ministries here at Edina Morningside Church. Our ministries are not for us alone. We are engaged in ministry here so that future generations will know that God is our God, forever and ever. Amen.

² Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year B, Volume 3: Pentecost and Season After Pentecost 1 (Proper 3-16).