

*Lyrics for His Life, Pt. 2*  
***The Son Does What He Sees***  
*Psalm 103: 1-14*

**First Presbyterian Church  
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This Lent, as always, we are spiritually journeying with Jesus towards his death and resurrection. We're keeping watch with him as engages his healing, redeeming ministry. We're standing with him as he encounters the hostility of the religious leaders. We're trying to keep faith with him as we enter the stories of his agony, his trial, his crucifixion and death. This year, though, we're adding a twist. We're pondering what psalms Jesus might have prayed in these events. We're trying to listen in on his inner prayer life. We're discovering that the psalms make great lyrics for Jesus. In the words of the psalms, he finds expression for his feelings, and a sense of hope and understanding about the events. I'm moved that you are pursuing this journey, and I love being on it with you.

Today, we're visiting the event in which Jesus heals a man who has been lame for 38 years. This lovely healing created conflict with the religious leaders because Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath. This was the day God's people were supposed to rest from the labors, not only to refresh, but to acknowledge that God can run the world without us. Healing was considered to be more work than the bare minimum Sabbath allowance. So rather than rejoice the man had been made well, they attacked Jesus. For the healing. And for calling God his personal Father.

Jesus replied by giving them a peek, a glimpse, into his inner motivation for ministry. He said, "The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees his Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing" (Jn. 5: 19-20). Jesus, the Son of the eternal Father, does not make up his own mission. He does not try to invent an identity for himself. Jesus the Son is an imitator. Jesus does what he sees his Father doing. Jesus the man enacts the personality, the mission, the passion of his heavenly Father. In all he does, Jesus reproduces what he has seen his Father doing. That's why Jesus can say such outrageously huge things about himself and not seem like an egotist. Because Jesus is not about himself. He is about his Father.

So, Jesus does what he sees his Father doing. But here's a question. *How* does Jesus see his Father doing things? How do *we* see what God is up to? We

might speculate that Jesus had some special visions in his prayer life. He may have received divine intuitions about his mission. As spiritually open as Jesus was, he would be a good candidate for direct revelation. But it would never have been simply some divine brain dump. Jesus made his way as a truly human savior. We saw last week that he had to learn as we do. He had to learn language. He had to learn the Scriptures. He had to learn the rhythm and rituals of gathered worship. Jesus would chiefly have learned about his Father the way we do: by reading, praying, studying and meditating on the Scriptures. The Scriptures are the special glasses, the spectacles of truth, by which we look at the world and see what God is up to. Jesus saw what his Father is doing as he learned Scripture in the context of the story of God's people in their history and worship. Just like us.

Now in our Lent book *Lyrics for His Life*, I invite you to say aloud a portion of Scripture every day. It's very easy to skip this part. After all, I've already read it yesterday, so let me just get on with today's lesson. But I want to encourage you that this is a really important part of the process. Reading Psalm 103: 1-2 aloud every day will make it become part of your memory. You will be able to say it during the night when you wake, on a plane when you are delayed, sitting in traffic or lying in a hospital bed. You will find that these verses become a dear friend. Now I got a double dose. I learned it last summer while writing. But then this year we created a podcast for each day's lesson. I got to say it aloud 42 times. One more time, with feeling! These words are deeply rooted in me now, and I feel like I have a treasure tucked up in mind.

Let's look at these words and then consider what they would have meant to Jesus. Let's think how these words would have shown Jesus what his Father is doing. "Bless the LORD, oh my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, oh my soul, and forget not all his benefits." David calls upon his own soul to speak well of the LORD, to give praise to God by recalling what God has been doing. Then he gives five key benefits, blessings, the LORD has given all of his people. 1) who forgives all your iniquity, 2) who heals all your diseases, 3) who redeems your life from the pit, 4) who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, and 5) who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

This is a great list to recall if you're ever wondering, "So what has the LORD done for me lately?" Well, maybe not too much except, oh, let's see, hmmm: forgiveness, healing, redeeming, crowning me with steadfast love and satisfying my soul with good." Just a few things like that!

Psalm 103 shows Jesus what his Father is doing. When Jesus prays Psalm 103, he blesses his Father for what he has seen him doing. That means Psalm 103 becomes a job description for what Jesus is to do. My Father forgives, heals, redeems, showers love and satisfies with good. That's what I'm supposed to do! Jesus prays Psalm 103 and syncs up his life with his Father's life. Jesus internalizes by this prayer the very heart of his Father's character. Then he goes out and gives expression to his Father's heart in the world. The Son does what he sees his Father doing. The Son sees his Father as the gathered community reads Scripture and recalls God's mighty saving acts in history. The Son sees his Father as the worshipers praise God in faith for what he is doing for his people right now. So then following such worship and praise, the Son goes out do what he has seen.

How about Psalm 103 as a job description for Jesus? The Father forgives all our iniquity. Jesus speaks to the paralytic "Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven" (Mt. 9:2). The Father heals our diseases. Jesus raises the paralytic and tells him to pick up the nasty mat on which he has been lying helplessly and walk, for the first time, back to his home. The Father redeems our life from the pit, the pit of the grave or the pit of despair. So, the Son stops a funeral procession, and raises the widow's only Son (Lk. 7; 11-13). Then he accepts the tears of the sinful woman and gathers her back into the community (Lk. 7: 48-50). The Father crowns us with steadfast love and mercy. So Jesus makes us shine as he says, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you...I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Jn. 15:9; Mt. 28: 20). He satisfies us with the goodness that is himself. "I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me shall not hunger" (Jn. 6: 35). Jesus in his rising and reigning can declare, "See, I make all things new" (Rev. 21: 7).

Let's take this further. When he prays Psalm 103, Jesus sees what his Father does. He syncs his heart to his Father's heart. He understands this psalm as describing his mission, which comes from the very center of his passionate love for his Father.

So, the psalm tells us of the Father's compassion. He knows us, how we are frail and fragile. He remembers that we are but made of the dust of the earth. Jesus enacted that compassion when he, as the eternal Son, took up a human body made of dust. He knows our mortality from the inside out. He has heart-reaching compassion upon us precisely because he let himself be made of dust in a mortal frame. His empathy for us is the costliest and most intimate imaginable.

Jesus' Father is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and mercy. So when Jesus contemplates the cross, he knows his arms will be nailed in the most outstretched position. He will enact the wideness in God's mercy. As far as east is from west, he will remove our sins. That's an infinite distance. Because on this earth you can go so far north that you reach the north pole, and the next step is south. North has a limit. But you can keep going east round and round the earth and the next step is always further east until the end of time. That's how far he removes our sins. He pardons all our iniquity not by a royal wave of the hand. But having his hands nailed and his whole body exposed upon the killing beams. Jesus enacts his Father's heart utterly.

Once again, let's close a bit early in order to take some time to pray alongside Jesus. I invite you to close your eyes. To put down anything in your hands and turn them palms up. Take a deep breath. And another. We have plenty of time. Now, let's imagine Jesus out in the field in the sunlight, with the sheep bleating around him. He beckons us to join him. We walk over, and he speaks, "Come here and pray with me. Isn't it beautiful here. I love to look at my Father's works and see all that he is doing. It makes my heart rejoice. It fills me with energy. I only want to do what I see my Father doing. Would you like to praise my Father with me? Stand with me and let's bless him. Let's praise him for his benefits. For forgiving sins, healing disease, redeeming us from the pit, crowning us with mercy and satisfying us with his goodness. Pray with me!" And so you do. You stretch forth your arms with Jesus. You lift your face toward heaven. You praise his Father as he leads you. And then you speak to Jesus something like this:

Bless the LORD O my soul!  
I rejoice with you, Jesus, to declare with you  
That your Father's love is from everlasting to everlasting.  
His steadfast love endures forever.  
Great is such faithfulness.  
And you, Lord Jesus, are the spitting image of your Father.  
You came to speak his love in a unique, precious tone of voice.  
You came to stretch forth his healing hand,  
You came to display the strength of his mighty arm  
In subduing evil and liberating the captive, the possessed and afflicted.

As a father shows compassion, so you showed the compassion  
Of your heavenly Father to me!  
You took up our frame of dust so you could know how it is with us.

You stretched forth your arms on the cross so we could see the wideness of your mercy.

You did all you see your Father doing so that joined to you, we can be part of his redeeming mission to the world.

With you, I bless your Father. And Lord Jesus, tender Savior, I bless you this day with all my heart.