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KCC Offices remain
closed except for

November 6, 2020

**Enjoy Each Week's Worshipful Experience
Premiering Saturday Evenings at 6:00 PM:**

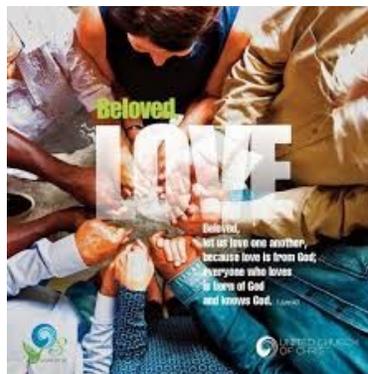
<http://www.kensingtonucc.com/media/listen-and-watch>

This Sunday is the 23rd Sunday After Pentecost.

This Week's Message by Pastor Darryl:
"In Christ There is No East or West, Red or Blue"

This Week's Scripture:
Ephesians 2: 11-22

Special Music by Bob Apgar:
"Morning Has Broken"



**Our 2021 Stewardship
Campaign Has Begun!**

"Beloved, Love."

This year's Stewardship
theme is, **"Beloved, Love"**.
We are reminded that love is
a call to action as we care for
each other in community.

Our annual campaign is now underway. Please look for your materials in the mail. If you do not receive any materials from us, please let us know and we will send them out to you. Your faithful stewardship allows us to plan the way forward for KCC as we navigate the challenges of mission and ministry during this pandemic.

Continuing this week, November 8, and leading up to Stewardship Sunday, November 15, our KCC Ministry Teams will be offering Stewardship Moments during the Worshipful Experiences talking about how we live into and live out our theme of "Beloved, Love."

October's Rachel's House serving was also a Potato Bar in honor of our traditional "Spud Bowl Stewardship Sunday Celebration."

God has done, and continues to do, remarkable things through and with us. We are grateful for your continuing financial

appointment only.
To make an appointment,
please email or call the
office.

We ask that for the
Safety of all,
Please Wear a
Face Mask
while on campus.

support.

For more information about Our Stewardship
Campaign, please read this week's

[Prayers and Announcements](#)



The Results of the Latest Survey from the Ministry of Worship and Nurture

The Ministry of Worship & Nurture (MWN) asked us to take part in a survey in the month of October to discern the level of desire and comfort for "In-Person" Activities and Worship at KCC. Though the response to the survey was not as robust as the Summer Survey, MWN gleaned good information about what our congregation's members and friends are feeling and hoping for - especially with the Holiday Season nearly upon us - in regards to "In-Person" worship and activities.

MWN wants you to have access to the summary of the survey, as well. Please click the link below to read the summary in full.

[View the Summary of the Survey Results](#)

The Ministry of Worship and Nurture will be using this survey along with the current guidelines for our County Health Professionals to create our Advent and Christmas Activities and Worship Schedule. MWN will be promoting that schedule in the days to come.

A Heartfelt Thank You from Pastor Darryl

Dear Friends,

I want to thank you all for the tremendous and totally unexpected Pastor Appreciation Gathering at Ward Canyon Park this past month. The event truly touched my heart and left me nearly speechless. It caught me totally off guard, and it was such a joyous surprise. I thoroughly enjoyed being with you on such a beautiful day in the park.

Every pastor hopes that our servant leadership is a spark of hope for our congregations and inspires others to love God, neighbor, and self. I have cherished watching the video tributes you created for Pastor Appreciation Day. They have humbled me. I am so honored to know my ministry and leadership has meant so much to so many of you. I am still slowly making my way through the cards you have written, as each one is a moment of grace for me in these trying times. And I have already treated myself to a beer and a dinner and a



yummy carrot cake due to your kindnesses and generosity.
Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

May God bless you and keep you all.
Be Safe. Stay Well. Love Often. Make Peace. Hope Always.

Pastor Darryl

P.S. A special thank you to Kay-Marie and Barbara for organizing the event; and to Sage and Irie for their covert operations in getting me to the park unawares!

BELIEVE. BELONG. BECOME.
An Open and Affirming Congregation
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info@kensingtonucc.com
<http://www.kensingtonucc.com>
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Friday, November 6, 2020

This Sunday, November 8, 2020, is the 23rd Sunday following Pentecost.

Our Worshipful Experience will be Available at 6:00 PM, Saturday, November 7,
via our YouTube Channel, Facebook Page, and on our website.

Saturday, November 7 — Filming begins for the 2020 Nativity

Sunday, November 8, Sunday School will meet via Zoom.

9:00 AM — Pre-K through Kindergarten Class
10:00 AM — 1st Grade through 3rd Grade Class
10:00 AM — 4th Grade through 6th Grade Class
11:00 AM — Youth Class (7th Graders through 12th Graders)

Sunday, November 8, at Noon — The Ministry of Worship & Nurture will meet via Zoom.

Monday, November 9, at 7:00 PM — The Ministry of Mission & Outreach will meet via Zoom.

Wednesday, November 11, at 12:00 PM — Lunchbreak Bible Study continues and will meet via Zoom.

Wednesday, November 11, at 6:30 PM — KCC Youth Group will meet via Zoom.

Thursday, November 12, at 6:30 PM — Grief Support Group continues meeting via Zoom.

Saturday, November 14 — Filming continues for the 2020 Nativity.

Sunday, November 15, Sunday School will meet via Zoom.

9:00 AM — Pre-K through Kindergarten Class

Sunday, November 15, at 10 AM – Confirmation will meet via Zoom.

-- A Prayer Written and Offered by Rear Adm. Dr. Barry Black (retired), Chaplain of the U.S. Senate --

Eternal and dependable Creator of the universe, we acknowledge you as the giver of every good and perfect gift. You are our solid rock; you arm us with strength. Thank you for the seasons and climates, for sowing and reaping, for color and fragrance. Thank you for the time of harvest when our labors and dreams are rewarded. Today, bless our nation. Illumine us to live lives that keep us on the right paths. May the creative power of your word produce in us a stronger faith and an indomitable hope. Keep us from slipping; fill us with courage as you show us your unfailing love. Give us an attitude of openness to receive the fullness of your grace and truth. We pray in your precious name. Amen.

Sunday School—This Sunday

9:00 AM — Pre-K through Kindergarten Class

10:00 AM — 1st Grade through 3rd Grade Class

10:00 AM — 4th Grade through 6th Grade Class

11:00 AM — Youth Class (7th Graders through 12th Graders)

Meeting Link all classes: <https://zoom.us/j/89552323542>

Meeting ID: 895 5232 3542

Passcode: 508681

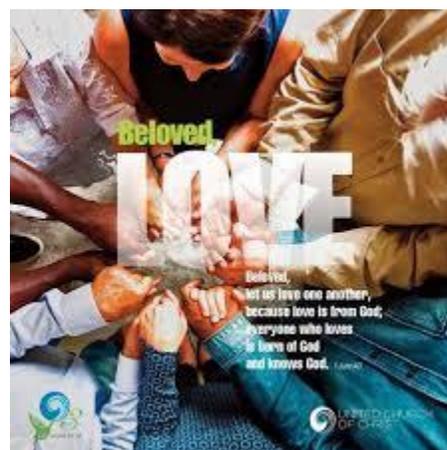


This Sunday, 1st graders through 12th graders are baking for Thanksgiving! Check your email for the ingredients.

Our Stewardship Season Continues this Sunday, November 8 during our Worshipful Experience and Concludes Sunday, November 15th on Stewardship Sunday.

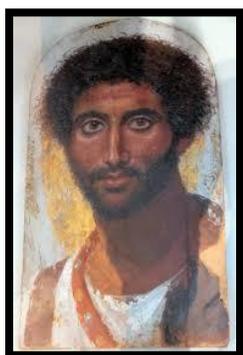
This year's Stewardship theme is, "*Beloved, Love*".

We are reminded that love is a call to action, as we care for each other in community. Our annual campaign is now underway. Please look for your materials in the mail. If you do not receive any materials from us, please let us know and we will send them out to you. Your faithful stewardship allows us to plan the way forward for KCC as we navigate the challenges of mission and ministry during this pandemic.



Leading up to Stewardship Sunday, our KCC Ministry Teams will be offering Stewardship Moments during the Worshipful Experiences, talking about how we live into and live out our theme of, "Beloved, Love."

God has done, and continues to do, remarkable things through and with us. We are grateful for your continuing financial support.



Our Lunchbreak Bible study continues this Wednesday, November 11, at Noon. We will gather virtually with KCC friends for Wednesday Bible Study, for our focus Bible Study: *The Jewishness of Jesus*. In preparation for the class, please read Mark 11: 15-19, Matthew 22: 15-46.

We hope you'll join us for this fun, insightful, inspirational, engaging time spent in community, nurturing our faith and growing in wisdom while on your lunch break.

Zoom Meeting Link: <https://zoom.us/j/91231720840>

Zoom Meeting ID: 912 3172 0840

Zoom Passcode: 440708



This Wednesday in Youth Group, join guest host, Pastor Darryl, for a fantastic evening of baking pop tarts and more! All 7th graders through 12th graders are welcome to join on Zoom. If you did not receive an email, please contact Barb (barbara.runco@gmail.com).

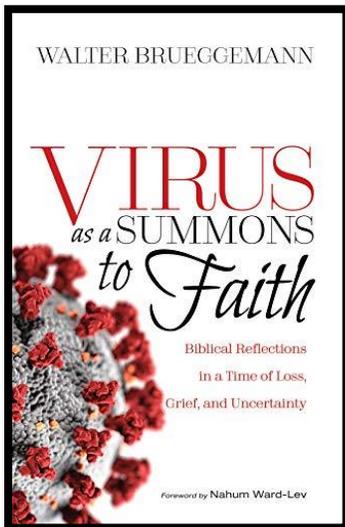
Our Grief Support Group has formed at KCC
Next Meeting November 12, at 6:30 PM over Zoom

In these tough times, a safe space among friends to grieve and mourn our losses are even more vital than usual. KCC is offering such a place. Loss comes in varied ways and this group is open to all who have experienced loss and desire to be in a supportive loving community.



The Grief Support Group meets Thursday evening, from 6:30 PM to 7:30 PM over Zoom. The Grief Support Group will continue to meet until November 19, and we ask that folks make a commitment to attend all the sessions. For information, please contact Bill Ehlers (bnschlers@cox.net or 619-466-2637).

Zoom Meeting Link: <https://zoom.us/j/91348954470>
Zoom Meeting ID: 913 4895 4470
Zoom Meeting Password: 399042



Theology on Tap will meet on Monday, November 16 at 6:30 PM, via Zoom.

This month we will be using a chapter from Dr. Walter Brueggemann's amazingly relevant and uplifting book, *Virus as a Summons to Faith*. A downloadable pdf of the chapter is available on our website: kensingtonucc.com/grow/adult-learning. It is a slim book, and if you are able, you are encouraged to read the entire book before Theology on Tap meets.

The Zoom meeting information will be published in the Chimes the Friday prior to Theology on Tap meeting. If you have any questions, please contact Pastor Darryl at darryl@kensingtonucc.com.

We hope that you'll join us for this inspiring conversation of faith, hope, and love.



**Rachel's House Dinner Service,
Sunday, November 29**

**At 4:45 PM – Drop Off Rachel's House
Items at KCC.**

**At 5:30 PM – Serve at Rachel's House if
conditions continue to improve.**



KCC continues to provide a meal on the last Sunday of each month to the women who live in Rachel's House night shelter. For our October meal, we brought the Spud Bowl to Rachel's House. We brought lots of hot potatoes and offered all the toppings you can think of: sour cream, cheese, broccoli, bacon bits, chili, green onions, and chives. It was quite a feast! Also included, a salad and oranges, and some spooky homemade cookies and brownies for dessert. Thanks to Elizabeth, Bonnie, Robert, Lily, Lael, and Christine for providing the meal.

Our next meal is the Sunday after Thanksgiving, November 29, and we will serve pasta with pumpkin cream sauce.

Sign up to help with side dishes here:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc6Csp960HQMWSJm4hT4ISUzKnnV0CVSKu6nqWFO DUHxKTRQ/viewform>

Let Sara know if you have any questions or would like to help, email kcc4rh@gmail.com or phone / text 857-222-0017.

The Southern Association of the Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ is seeking new members for its Executive Committee and its Church and Ministry Committee!

- Wish to serve the wider church in a position of leadership?
- Wish to help seminarians on their path to ordination?
- Wish to dive deeper into the diverse communities that make up our community and the varied expressions of our faith?

Then you might consider serving on either the Executive Committee or the Church and Ministry Committee of our Association. For more information about the details of these wonderful opportunities to serve, please contact Pastor Darryl. darryl@kensingtonucc.com

2020 Nativity

On Saturday, the children and youth begin filming the video adaptation of the Live Nativity, called the 2020 Nativity. With the support of the Council, MWN and MMO, the children and youth will perform outdoors at a safe distance from each other and everyone involved in the production will wear a mask. They will go through health screenings and will have supportive adults to ensure physical distancing. Plus, each child and youth will have their own special mask and plenty of bottles of water and individually wrapped snacks to keep them energized. And did we mention the pony? Yes, there will be a pony, too. The pony plays the important role of Mary's donkey. In these unusual times, please pray for dry weather and send the children, youth and volunteers a loving prayer.



Sunday School Greetings for KCC's Older Adults



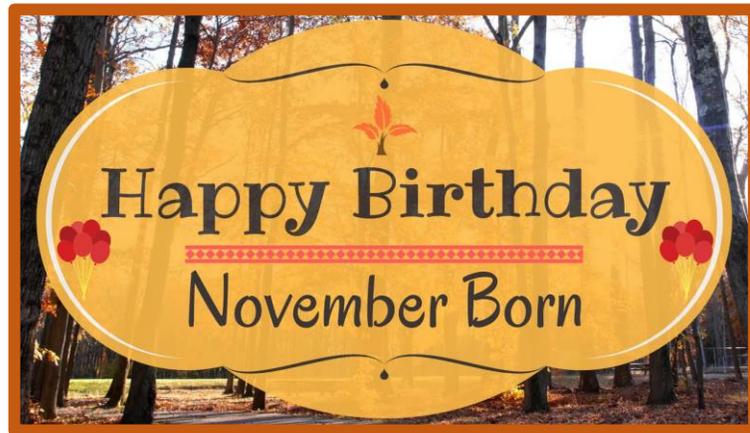
Please check your mail for a sweet note from a KCC child, youth or Sunday School teacher. In October and November, the Sunday School classes are sending a note, a drawing and some cheer to our older adults. If you would like to reply to your pen pal, please send cards to KCC and they will be forwarded. Stay tuned for more opportunities to write notes to KCC folks.

Please Hold in Your Heart and Lift in Prayer:

Alexis, Jason Artiaga, Naomi Bellamy, Bruce & Pam Biedebach, Carol Bond, Fred E. Boone, Brian Brewster, Jan Burth and Family, Martha Ceriani, Carolyn & Steve Davis, Frank Denz, Roy DiBello, Betsie Dudgeon, Enid Escobedo, Tricia Filet, Dean Hansen-Tarbox, Sheila Hauserman, Chuck & Irena Hukari, Pastor Darryl & all of our community, Joann Kingsbury, Fran Knapp, Chuck Lee, Barbara Murillo, Jordan Pierce, Larissa Ponce, Karla Pujol, Marie Pujol, Henry Ramos, Abra Rider, Stephanie Vigarion, St. John Walker, Debbie Williamson, and Renee Quick.

Prayers of support for Sheryl Chaffee and the greater Chaffee family for the passing of Sheryl's mom, Estelle Trzcinski and her family for the passing of her husband Ed, the family and friends of Richard Roberts, father of Jennifer Roberts, the family and friends of Nina Deering, Tim Mackey Gardner, Andrew Kytasty, Helen Kytasty, Richard Moreno (Kay-Marie-Moreno's father-in-law), and Harry Petty.

We also hold in our prayers our nation in this election season, victims of racial injustice in the US, Nova Scotia, Canada, Hong Kong, Chile, Nashville, TN, Syria (Kurds), Iran, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, India, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the Refugees from Latin America in Tijuana, Mexico, all of our country and the world, particularly first responders and medical workers, dealing with the coronavirus, and all of those affected by the California fires.



- 1 Marg Stark
- 7 Denise Madruga; Mick McClain
- 9 Brian Brewster
- 11 Audrey Freeman
- 16 Martha Ceriani; Betty Lou Uhazie
- 24 Karla Noah

KENSINGTON COMMUNITY CHURCH OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR JOB DESCRIPTION

An open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ, Kensington Community Church (KCC), seeks an Office Administrator to support our ministry and mission. An ideal candidate would bring passion and joy to their work, be inclusive in their outlook, and be supportive of KCC's progressive theology and our Open and Affirming beliefs.

The purpose of the Office Administrator is twofold:

- to facilitate the day-to-day administrative and programmatic functions of KCC, inclusive of providing clerical support to the Senior Minister, other staff members, and church programs.
- to oversee the day to day administrative operations of KCC.

Areas of Responsibility

- Provide administrative support to KCC staff and lay-leadership by preparing printed or digital materials, weekly news e-announcements using various digital and social media platforms, prepare reports, and handling information requests.
- Assist in maintaining up-to-date church and preschool website content.
- Perform clerical functions such as preparing correspondence, receiving visitors, checking, and responding to email and mail, answering phone calls, printing, copying, and scanning documents, etc.
- Maintain and publish church, school, and community Google calendars including building use and daily log.
- Keep up-to-date inventories of office supplies and postage. Order and buy supplies as needed.
- Oversee the day-to-day physical plant of the campus, ensuring tidiness of office, alerting the Ministry of Finance and Stewardship of building issues.
- Schedule any building and equipment maintenance.
- Act as the liaison to groups using the facilities.
- Keep bulletin boards updated with information.
- Assist the Treasurer, Bookkeeper, and Financial Secretaries in making deposits and maintaining accurate financial records through timely data entry.
- Other duties as assigned and/or necessary.

Position Details

- 25-29 hours per week. Part-time, non-exempt; with the potential to become full-time.
 - Monday-Thursday, 8:30 AM -2:30 PM; Friday 8:30 AM- 12:30 PM
 - Remote work is available upon approval from Senior Minister
- Compensation will be commensurate with background and experience (\$18.00-\$25.00 per hour)
- Benefit Package includes paid time off and disability/life insurance; health insurance benefits are negotiable.

Qualifications

The Office Administrator must:

- Share in the vision, mission, and values of KCC, an Open and Affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ.
- Skilled in the following areas and applications
 - Verbal and written communication
 - Work organization and time management
 - Database data entry and database utilization
 - Working knowledge of QuickBooks or other financial software to perform data entry of income and expenses
 - Microsoft Office and Google Drive for document and newsletter management, presentation creation, and simple spreadsheet creation
 - Website content creation and basic editing (Word Press)
 - Willingness to learn new skills and ways of working
- The ability to work well with people and to maintain confidentiality.
- The Office Administrator is expected to have a flexible “can do” spirit to tackle duties that are not a part of formal job description.

Education and Experience

- High School Diploma or GED equivalency required
 - Some College Level Courses is desired
- 1-3 years’ experience as an administrative assistant
 - Previous job experience as an Administrative Assistant in a House of Worship is a plus

Reporting & Evaluation

The Office Administrator reports directly to the Senior Minister. Reviews will be conducted by the Senior Minister and the Ministry of Personnel and Resource.

How to Apply

Please send resume and cover letter to Rev. Darryl Kistler at darryl@kensingtonucc.com before Wednesday, November 18, 2020 to be considered for the position.

Cover letter should include replies to the following questions:

- Having browsed our website (kensingtonucc.com), how might you fit into the culture and vision of the congregation?
- What draws you to apply for this position?
- How does your experience and qualifications make you an ideal candidate to be our new Administrative Assistant?

my hand is stretched out,
my soul refuses to be comforted.
 I think of God,
 I moan
 I meditate,
my spirit faints,
my eyelids are kept by God from closing
 I am so troubled that I cannot speak
 I consider the days of old,
 I remember the years of long ago,
 I commune with *my heart*²
 I meditate and search *my spirit*.

The speaker does a complete inventory of his/her own person and sees how it is all, in every part, mobilized for self-concern.³

2. Then in vv. 7-9, there is a series of rhetorical questions. But even here there is no yielding of the agenda of self:

Will the Lord spurn forever
 and never again be favorable?
 Has steadfast love ceased forever?
 Are his promises at an end for all time?
 Has God forgotten to be gracious?
 Has he in anger shut up his compassion?

There is obviously a reference to YHWH, more than appeared in vv. 1-6. But the rhetorical effort is to draw YHWH completely into the orbit of self-concern. In these verses, there occur three of Israel's most precious covenantal words, *hesed*, *hnan*, *raham*—loyalty, graciousness, compassion. The questions pose the most urgent faith issues. They ask about the very character of God. But they are questions that emerge out of an overriding self-concern. They appear to ask about God's faithfulness. But they really ask, what about me? Even the most primal qualities of YHWH are consumed in this self-preoccupation. Thus far, we are at the pool

2. "I commune with my heart" is a statement of religion reduced to self-preoccupation, not unlike the characterization of the Pharisee (Luke 18:11) who "prayed with himself."

3. The self-inventory is paralleled to the lamentation of Ps 22:17: "I count all my bones."

5

THE "TURN" FROM SELF TO GOD

Psalms 77

Psalm 77 offers a stunning embodiment of the reorientation of life most hoped for by evangelical faith. In the exposition that follows, I take the psalm not simply as a devotional or liturgical residue of faith but as an actual "speech pilgrimage" of one whose self spoke through to new faith. Specifically, the psalm shows the route by which this life was moved from a *preoccupation with self* to a *submission to and reliance upon God*.

SELF-CONCERN

The first part of the psalm is a fairly standard lament statement.¹ We can enter its claim by noticing the quite different rhetorical moves made by the speaker.

1. The speaker is turned in on self in pity and self-preoccupation, and they can speak of nothing but self (vv. 1-6):

I cry aloud to God . . .
 I seek the Lord

1. See Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms*, 8-11; *Spirituality of the Psalms*, 25-45.

of Narcissus.⁴ The speaker sounds as one who understands how it all works. He knows what mobilizes God's *hesed* and *raham*. She knows how to get to it. The crisis of the poem may be one of two things. Either the speaker knows how to make it all work, which means everything has been emptied of mystery, or, more likely, even though the speaker knows how to make it work, it does not work! It is then a religion that has failed.

Janzen has suggested that some rhetorical questions in the speech of the Old Testament are not mere rhetoric but are serious questions.⁵ Such questions ask the unaskable. In the form of a question, the speaker moves into dangerous and unexplored territory in the space between us and the throne. In our psalm, the speaker is a person of conventional obedience. He has some ground to stand on and some legitimate expectations of YHWH. He is not a renegade who has forfeited his expectations from God. But the voice of obedience is on the move, driven there by the failure of convention. Her imagination is beginning to move, beginning to guess that God's *hesed* is not unilaterally unconditional and automatically linked to this particular believer. The poem begins to suspect that God's *hesed* (if indeed God is faithful!) has other worlds to work and cannot be summoned on demand. God is not on call. There is a probe here that the space between the two partners is dangerous and unknown. All of that space has not yet been reduced and routinized so that it can be presumed upon. Some of the space between here and God's throne is untamed and therefore unpredictable. And if the space is beyond control, it makes one more frantically press for the old, innocent faith that had God encapsulated.

This speaker had grown comfortable with the great affirmations of YHWH because the great affirmations readily translated

4. Christopher Lasch has made important linkages between the myth and the pathology of our time in *Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. One of the important ingredients in such immobilizing narcissism is the flattening of imagination so that the person is incapable of thinking of life other than it presently is, or incapable of thinking of life beyond self.

5. Janzen, "Metaphor and Reality in Hosea 11."

into self-serving assurance. But now that is all being blown out of the water. A God who has been reduced to the safe proposals of "a torah so righteous" (cf. Deut 4:8) is now known to be a God whose "form is not seen" (cf. Deut 4:12), even if that form is thought to consist in *hesed*, *hanan*, *raham*. The desperate rhetorical questions appear in vv. 7-9 after this self-inventory of vv. 1-6. The speaker begins to guess that the old, sure religion is collapsing.

NEW QUESTIONS

There is a striking move from the "I, I," in vv. 1-6, which is still safely rooted and conventional and with no failure of nerve, to the probe of the questions of vv. 7-9, which ask new questions. And then there is v. 10. This verse is the crucial turn in the psalm, exceedingly difficult to translate. This verse clearly looks both ways, back to the "I" statements of vv. 1-6 and forward to the rest of the psalm (vv. 11-20). Verse 10 consists in two elements. The first element is a statement about *grief or trouble*.⁶ The second element is a statement of *change*, presumably that God has changed. The translation is difficult, and there is some variation of nuance. RSV renders:

And I say, "It is my grief
that the right hand of the Most High has changed."

The Jerusalem Bible renders:

"This," I said then, "is what distresses me;
that the power of the Most High is no longer what it was."

More poignantly, the New English Bible renders:

Has his right hand, I said, lost its grasp?
Does it hang powerless, the arm of the Most High?

Kraus comments: "God's works and ways are for human beings out of reach (Isa 55:8ff); they lie in an inaccessible,

6. Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 2:214-15, takes the word from *lilli*, and understands it as "kill" (pierce), and renders it "my death." See the helpful and lucid comment of Anderson, *Book of Psalms*, 2:558.

consuming brightness. He himself, YHWH, is the Holy One (Ps 71:22, 89:19 [ET=18]), the 'wholly Other.' His salvific deeds prove his incomparability (cf. Exod 15:11).⁷⁷

The speaker has discovered that YHWH has freedom, will not be on call, not presumed upon. God is not locked into a quid pro quo. And it causes grief, illness, despondency to discern that the partner has changed. Observance of the freedom God has to change causes a terrible unsettling among the faithful. The sure comfort of an utterly obedient relationship is shattered by the awareness that this hidden, free God will not be fully discerned or completely predictable. And the response must be to break out of obedience of a simple kind for the practice of an imagination that seeks to find other ways of relating to this free God. To relate to such a free God requires freedom on the part of the believer, a freedom likely censored by the conventional religion of vv. 1–6.

The grief here expressed is not unlike the pouting of Jonah over God's graciousness (Jonah 4:1, 9). Only here, the depression is more intense. And the substance moves in the opposite direction from that of Jonah. Jonah is disconcerted that God is gracious when he does not want God to be gracious. Here the psalmist is dismayed that God is not graciousness when he had fully counted on that predictable graciousness.

The discernment of Ps 77:10, anguished as it is, admits of more than one reading. If one is linked to a flat, one-dimensional faith, then this verse is a *bitter loss of faith*. But if we think in terms of obedience on its way to risky imagination, then this verse is an *opening for new faith* beyond the conventions and routines that secure but do not reckon with God's *awefulness*. This verse stands at a very risky and dangerous place where evangelical faith often stands. And indeed must stand. And as we stand there, we never know in advance if we face *loss of faith* or *opening for new faith*. The dramatic substance of v. 10 leaves the issue quite unresolved. And we must not rush past that dramatic moment in this speech-pilgrimage.

7. Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 116.

A WOUNDED PARTNER

So the psalm makes its desperate way beyond v. 10. We have now the speech of a wounded partner well beyond the old innocence. We do not know how this speaker moves from v. 10 to v. 11. But we can surmise it was not an easy move. We do not know how any faith-speaker makes the leap from the preoccupation with self to an imaginative acknowledgment of the primacy of the other. But that is what happens in this psalm and in all serious biblical faith. It involves leaving the safety of "the torah so righteous" for "the God so near" who is yet so free (Deut 4:7–8). The dramatic move concerns the abandonment of self as the primal agenda for the 'Thou who is out beyond us in freedom. And we make no mistake to observe that that transfer of the agenda, that ceding of concern for self to the other, is the crucial move of biblical faith, the *sine qua non* for covenanting. And we observe what an urgent, difficult task Christian nurture and preaching now is. For the narcissism of our culture (on which see vv. 1–6) is precisely aimed at *not* ceding self, not relinquishing. This psalm models the very move of faith that our cultural ideology wants to prevent. The whole consumer perspective concerns retention of self and satiation of self. That is what is given in vv. 1–6, and what is relinquished in what follows.

Note that this was not the only move possible after v. 10. It is one among some options. After the wonderment of the questions of vv. 7–9 and the startling discovery of v. 10, another move could have been made. The speaker could have moved to Ps 14 and concluded, "There is no God." The move beyond v. 10 is a hazardous one—for any of us. And the outcome is never sure ahead of time. But the move has been made here, a move that now reckons the free "Thou" as the starting point for life.⁸

8. Worth noting is the argument made here in sharp distinction from that of Gordon Kaufman in his excellent book, *Theological Imagination*, 63–75. If I read Kaufman correctly, he argues that the self-conscious assertion of "I" leads to the liberating reality of "Thou." I believe this psalm argues that the move is not from a full act of self-consciousness but from relinquishment of self, precisely what modernity finds so difficult.

That move, one of several possibilities, concerns us directly as we seek to be faithful and as we seek to live in our culture. On the one hand, that move made in v. 11 is a move from a religion of law to a religion of grace. It articulates the awareness that we live by gift and not by grasp. On the other hand, observe that in our society of consumer narcissism, a *religion of petty moralistic obedience* goes with an *economics of satiation*. That is, in our secularized version of it, we do not hope for God to satisfy all our desires (Ps 145:16). But we do expect to have all our desires satisfied, even if by another source. So we are part of a culture that holds together *consumer satiation* and *petty obedience*. That tight alliance serves to keep us as the agenda, an excuse for not ceding life beyond self, an inability to transfer attention beyond our needs and appetites.

The religious temptation among us is to walk close to the dangerous rhetorical questions of vv. 7-9 and become aware of the hurt and anguish of v. 10 but then not move on to v. 11, not move to the "Thou," but to circle back again to vv. 1-6, which permits a preoccupation with self (and self's program) and requires a numbing.⁹ Because being numb will do if there is no deliverance.

A NEW WORLD OF IMAGINATION

By the mercy of God, the psalm does not circle back. And if it did, it would then be only a mirror for our fearful self-preoccupation. It would then not be a model of faith but only an exercise in self-serving. But it moves on. It says something new and surprising and unpredictable. And that is why we attend to it. It moves on in remarkable fashion so that v. 11 follows closely after v. 10. We may be glad for that modeling of the move. But we recognize at the same time that we do not know how it is possible. We presume that this move, here or anywhere, is not made easily or quickly. Likely, there is a long pause in the psalm, a desperate resistance, a

9. On "numbing" as the problem of our culture, see Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering*; and especially the important work of Robert J. Lifton, whose major summary is *The Broken Connection*.

counting the cost, like standing at the edge of the cold swimming pool, testing it with a toe, putting it off, and then the quantum leap into the new icy world of imaginative faith. It is indeed a turning loose of the old self.

The move from vv. 1-10 to v. 11 is like the move envisioned by Jesus:

For whoever would save his life will lose it;
and whoever loses his life for my sake
and the gospel's will save it. (Mark 8:35)

The first part, with the series of "I" is about *keeping life*. And the move to the second part with the series of "Thou" is a readiness to *lose life in order to gain it*. I do not suggest that prayer and liturgy are the full scope of self-surrender. But I am very sure that unless there are liturgic ways for that move in our lives, we will not make them elsewhere, either with reference to personal maturation or to social change. The very rhetoric of Israel here makes such a move thinkable, i.e., capable of being imagined.

There is a waiting, a hoping, a resisting, a yielding, a dying, a being surprised. By v. 11, the speaker has abandoned the preoccupation with self and is able to focus on this one who "has changed," the same change that caused resentment and loss in v. 10.

Re-entering Our Past

By v. 11, the speaker is on the way into a new world of imagination. In vv. 1-6, the speaker had focused narrowly on "my present," which is all consuming. Now there is a reentry into "our past," which had been bracketed out in self-preoccupation. And in the pondering of that past, the speaker comes to the fresh awareness that it is precisely God's freedom to change and come and go that is the hope of Israel and the deliverance of folks like the speaker, in this present or in any present.

In the second part of the psalm, a very different vocabulary is now at work:

- v. 11 "deeds" (*ma'alele*)
 "wonders" (*pilekah*)
 v. 12 "work" (*pa'alekah*)
 "deeds" (*alilothikah*)

These four terms are stated in a concise chiasmus. The key point is made in v. 13: "Thy way, O God, is holy (*qadosh*)."² God's way is "wholly Other" (*ganz Anders*), not to be reduced, not to be accommodated or conformed either to my needs or my expectations. And then, following naturally, there is an assertion of incomparability: "What god is great like our God?"³ The question sounds like that of Deut 4:8, to which we have made reference. No god like ours, no god so near, no god so free, no god so surprising or exasperating. Here is the end to all analogy. And the bold, liberated speaker of vv. 11–20 discovers that the self-preoccupied speaker of vv. 1–6 was complaining about an idol, for this free God of *hesed*, *hanan*, *rahum* will not be treated like a fortune cookie.

A Concluding Recontextualization

The remainder of the psalm (vv. 15–20) is like a credo that recites the great deeds of the past. Verse 15 uses Exodus language with the verb *ga'al*. Verses 16–18 talk about a storm. It could be any storm God. The language is not unlike the Canaanite imagery of Ps 29. But the language of the storm is regularly drawn toward this people. Verse 16 has echoes of Ps 114:3–4, which uses sea imagery for Exodus. Verses 17–18 are about a storm. But the point is for Israel in vv. 19–20, which becomes completely concrete and completely Israelite at the end, with the mention of Moses and Aaron.

Most striking about this psalm is its abrupt ending. Nothing here about a return to the agenda of vv. 1–6. There is nothing about all of that being resolved. It is as though the speaker is left to draw her own conclusions about the condition of vv. 1–6 in relation to the statements of vv. 15–20. Nothing has been resolved, but everything has been recontextualized. The speaker in vv. 1–6 is preoccupied because he is caught in a narrow range in which such personal trouble requires a conclusion that God does not care.

That narrow religious agenda is however shattered. It is shattered by remembering, by awareness of God's incomparability, by reference to Israel's concrete history, but most of all, it is shattered by the utterance, *Thou* (*attah*).

Now I have dealt with this psalm in detail because I take it to be structurally the story of God's people who are always *trapped* and/or *on the move*. This psalm knows that all of us live in this battle. We struggle to stay home with the sure company of "I." We move between a petty religion of calculating obedience aimed at well-being and a fully-liberated, imaginative religion of awe and amazement and trembling before the Holy One. In this psalm, vv. 1–6 (7–9) articulate the first, vv. 11–20 speak about the alternative. The first is dominated by "I." The second is governed by "Thou."

Thou art God (v. 14)
Thou didst redeem thy people with *thine* own arm (v. 15)
 the waters saw *thee*
 the crash of *thy* thunder
thy lightnings
thy way was through the sea
thy path through the great waters
thy footprints unseen (vv. 16–19).
Thou didst lead thy people (v. 20).

Note that after v. 12, there is not a single "I." One can observe that there is a neat contrast between the "my" of the first half—my trouble, my hand, my spirit, my eyelids, my soul, my heart, my spirit—and the "thy" in the second half—thy thunder, thy lightning, thy way, thy path, thy footprints. The rhetorical change cannot be accidental. The contrast is total, decisive, and intentional. And the turn is in v. 10. Everything is up for grabs in v. 10, waiting for fresh resolution. It is the pastoral moment that could go either way. It is the evangelical moment in which the news may break. It is a moment of deciding to live in the world where the Most High changes or to retreat back into a world where "least high" keeps us at the center of things. It is the pastoral task to be present to that moment of terror, a moment which requires enormous imagination.



From Self to Thou

You, holy, faithful, merciful God,
have called us into being,
given us names, faces, and vocations, and
we live them out in freedom.
In our freedom, we notice only sometimes, that
we cannot cope with all that comes at us,
we cannot finally outflank the forces that address us, and
we cannot by ourselves deal with the grief, trouble, and anger
that well up in us.

After our imagined autonomy,
we gladly turn back to you.
After we have said "I" for a very long time,
we fall back to "Thou";
we utter the "Thou" who inhabits our memories,
memories of rescue, healing, and forgiveness;
we utter the "thou" who occupies our best hopes,
as we hope for peace, wellbeing, and justice in the
world.

We move back into faithful dialogue with you:
we say "thou" as we thank and praise you;
we say "I" as we act out our freedom and accept our
responsibility.
Just now, in the face of the virus, we find our best "I" without force,
and so we say "thou,"
"thou" in power,
"thou" in mercy,
"thou" in faithfulness,
finally "Thou"!
We remember all your wonders, and then, in gladness,
we remember who we are as yours;
we recover our gratitude, our hope, our resolve, and our confi-
dence. Amen.

6

GOD'S NEW THING

Isaiah 43:18-19

It is possible to trust that the God of the Gospel is in, with, and under the crisis of the virus without imagining that God is the cause of it. As God often does, in hidden ways God may be amid this crisis to do the hard work of checking arrogance and curbing hubris. Amid the virus, we now face an alert about the indifferent, exploitative world of global self-sufficiency we have been making and that some of us mightily enjoy.

- We now see curbed the absolute world of technological certitude that faces a mystery beyond calculation.
- We see that our immense power is unable to fend off a threat that is for the moment beyond our explanation.
- We see that our great wealth is not able to assure us of security.

We are pressed back to basics!

The God of the Gospel, however, not only curbs and checks our excessive ambition. We may imagine God doing a new thing among us. Perhaps we are arriving at a new neighborly normal:

- Imagine, we are treating prisoners differently, even releasing some who constitute no threat.
- Imagine, we are mobilizing generous financing for needy neighbors who must have resources in order to survive.
- Imagine, we are finding generous provisions for students and their debts.

In the assertion of God's newness, the prophet is engaged in a daring act of imagination whereby he hosts a possible world that is not yet in view. If we are to be faithful heirs and practitioners of this daring prophetic imagination then we, too, in the wake of the prophet, are summoned to engage in daring imagination concerning new historical possibility. The heirs of the prophetic tradition are not captured by what they see in front of them. Nor are they smitten by a preoccupation with what once was treasured. Prophetic imagination is the anticipation of new social possibility that is available from the intention of the God of the prophets. What is now required of us is not simply fantasy but moral imagination to express historical possibility that is congruent with God's hope for neighborliness. That moral imagination is rooted in promise; at the same time, it is grounded in the realities of dollars, laws, natural resources, and social conditions. The prophetic task is to submit our awareness of dollars, laws, natural resources, and social conditions to the hopes of the creator God. Such imagination is indeed, "The assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen" (Heb 11:1).

In our moment of fear and insecurity, we may be tempted to hold on to what was once safe and secure. Prophetic tradition knows, to the contrary, that the future does not reside in old, treasured realities. It belongs, rather, to bold faithful thought that evokes bold faithful action. This has always been the prophetic task, and it is now, in this freighted moment, our prophetic task. The new thing God is making possible is a world of generous, neighborly compassion. It is before our very eyes! The God who does this new thing has also said, "Do not remember former things." We have so much we will do well to forget.

- We may forget punitive measures toward outliers.
- We may forget parsimony toward those in need.
- We may forget predatory policies toward the vulnerable.

The good news is that we need not go back to those old ways that are punitive, parsimonious, and predatory. We can embrace a new normal that is God's gift to us!

