

Incarnation: Seeing the Psalms (Part 1)

- A Mirror to the Soul
- Relationship
- Praying the Psalms
- Imprecatory Psalms
- Worship
- Incarnation: Seeing the Psalms

The Theology of Imagery

- The Psalms are considered the “Romans of the Old Testament”
- The theological center of the Old Testament
- The Bible’s most introspective book that most intensely probes the inner depths of the spirit
 - The gamut of raw human emotion and response to God
 - An intense binding of the knowledge of self and the knowledge of God
- So much of this the Psalms do through the power of imagery – through simile and metaphor.

In other books one hears only what one must do and what one must not do...But in the book of Psalms, the one who hears, in addition to learning these things, also comprehends and is taught in the emotions of the soul, and consequently...he is enabled by this book to possess the image deriving from the words.

Athanasius, *Letter to Marcellinus*, 4th Century

- **Similes** are **explicit** comparisons which use the words *like* or *as*.

Psalms 42:1

As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, God.

Psalm 7:1-2

O Lord my God, in You I have taken refuge;
Save me from all those who pursue me, and rescue me,
Or he will tear my soul like a lion,
Dragging me away, while there is no one to rescue *me*.

Psalm 37:1-2

Do not get upset because of evildoers,
Do not be envious of wrongdoers.
²For they will wither quickly like the grass,
And decay like the green plants.

How is A like B? What commonalities do they share and how does that enrich my understanding?

- **Metaphors** are **implicit** comparisons without the mention of like or as.
 - A metaphor conveys a more vivid image than a simile because it is implicit, and relates the comparison more intimately.

Psalm 23:1-2

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

- Good similes and metaphors reveal a new network of associations, a new vision, the birth of a new understanding.

Why do the Psalms and other parts of Scripture use imagery (similes and metaphors) so often? Why not be more precise and direct in the language?

- Images speak more fully and profoundly to us by stirring our emotions.
- Simile and Metaphor help to communicate deep truths in a way that can't be exhaustively explained through precise language (e.g. the nature of God).
- Imagery calls on the work of **Imagination** – thinking and meditating more deeply on truth.
 - We've experienced this in the Prophets and the Parables of Jesus, but nowhere as prolific as in the Psalms.

Proverbs 25:2 It is God's privilege to conceal things and the king's privilege to discover them.

Isaiah 6: 10

"Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed."

Matthew 13: 10-13

And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand."

- The Language of Scripture is in varying degrees **"the language of sanctified imagination"**:

The world which the text produces is not simply a haphazard collection of compositions written by various authors speaking from and for diverse communities over a period of centuries, but it is also a complex network of literary interconnections established by the use and reuse of terms that gain depth and richness by means of intricate and subtle allusion. Attention to these interconnections is justified, therefore, because together they create a world of metaphoric structures within which humans can live in a distinctive manner. – Luke Johnson, *Imagining the World*

Can you think of some examples of metaphors used and reused throughout Scripture that grow in meaning and richness with each new appearance?

- Author Kathleen Norris says the modern church has failed to cultivate what she calls “incarnational language,” namely, “words that resonate with the senses as they aim for the stars.”
 - **Incarnation:** “the word made flesh”

I think it’s crazy when the church borrows all this language from the corporate world, and it really doesn’t make sense, when you have this wonderful traditional language. It’s just that when I’m preaching I try to be aware that there may be someone in that congregation who may be like I was when I was making my way back to the church. I can’t just toss out those words without giving this person something to hang on to. “Oh, so that’s what this means! That’s her experience with this word!”

Like “righteousness.” It really has a very deep meaning in the Bible. It doesn’t mean self-righteousness at all. It refers to someone who is doing “just” things. Someone who is seeking justice for the poor, the widow, the orphan - it’s a classic, prophetic use of the word. Discoveries like this were very important to me, and I try to make them available to others.

-- Kathleen Norris, *Interview with Homiletics Online*

- **Incarnational Language** is the language of Scripture, and nowhere is this more readily seen than in the images of the Psalter.

Seeing the Psalms Through Metaphor and Simile

- The Metaphor of Refuge & Protection
- The Metaphor of Pathway
- The Imagery of the Transplanted Tree
- The Metaphor of Light
- The Metaphor of Water
- Animals as Similes and Metaphors
- Other Imagery