

Taste and See that the Lord is Good
Psalm 34
June 2, 2024 – Center Harbor Congregational Church, UCC
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I'd like you to think for a moment of a two-year-old that you have known – your child, your grandchild or niece or nephew. Think of this toddler when they were at the height of their little two-year-old authority, having just discovered that they possessed the word “NO!” You don't have to tell THEM that “no” is a complete sentence. They use it that way all the time.

“Do you want a nap?” “No!”

“The sky is blue.” “No!”

“Here, try this. You'll like it.” “No!”

Two-year-olds can be especially suspicious of new foods. They are convinced that trying any new food is a trick to get them to eat something truly yucky. So, if you want them to try something that you know they will like – like ice cream – you use your spoon to get just a tiny bit of it on their lips, so they have to lick it off. Suddenly they are ALL ABOUT ice cream, and NO is no longer in their vocabulary. “Just taste it. You'll like it!”

Now, I have to give it to two-year-olds. They are perfectly confident in their rejection of new things. They don't feel a need to mask their suspicion with polite language. As grown-ups, we have learned to say “no thank you” or “I'm good” or “maybe later” instead of just plain “NO!” But at heart, we can still be like two-year-olds, resisting something new that could be just amazing. We can be a little hesitant to taste for ourselves, too.

And that is what I love about today's scripture, Psalm 34. This is a psalm of praise for rescue from trouble. The psalmist has had some terrible experience and been redeemed by God. “I will bless the Lord at all times,” the psalmist writes. “God's praise shall continually be in my mouth.... I sought the Lord and God answered me and delivered me from all my fears.... This poor soul cried and was heard by the Lord and was saved from every trouble.”

The psalmist is giving a testimony to their experience of God as faithful rescuer, and they want us all to join in knowing God, praising God, trusting God in our own lives. “O magnify the Lord with me. Let us exalt God's name together.” And “O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in God.”

Here, try this. You'll like it! Just a taste....

This psalm does not promise that God will keep us from experiencing bad things in our lives. In fact, it says, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous.” Instead, we are promised that God will be present with us and redeem even the darkest nights of our souls. “The Lord is near to the broken-hearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.”

Taste and see that the Lord is good.

This beautiful image was written maybe a thousand years before Jesus was born, but it was remembered and used by the earliest Christian communities. Newly baptized Christians would come up out of the river or out of the baptismal pool and immediately receive a drink of milk sweetened with honey, and the baptizer would say, "Here, taste and see that the Lord is good."

Today, Christians remember this psalm at Communion, when indeed we taste the goodness of our Lord. And in Communion, we are reminded of why we can trust God with our whole selves. We hear again the story of Emmanuel, God with us, God who shared our earthly lives, who laughed with us and cried with us. God, who died with us, and who showed us the way to eternal life.

We are not alone in this world. In joy or in sorrow, we are not alone. "When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and rescues them from all their troubles." The psalm says. "The Lord is near to the broken-hearted, and saves the crushed in spirit." And "Happy are those who take refuge in the Lord."

Beloveds, we can find refuge in the Lord. We can trust God to be present with us in good times and in bad. God can take the worst messes that we make of our lives and redeem them, drawing a straight line from the heart of our troubles to the very heart of God.

We are not promised an easy life, a life without sorrow or pain. Instead, God promises us a sacred life, a life lived in God's holy presence, a life redeemed by God's own hand. And that is a gift so precious that we must share it with those we love, as the psalmist did.

O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt God's name together. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

Amen