

“Steadfast Love: a Homily at a Taize Service” March 21, 2001 Rev. Keenan Kelsey

TEXT: Psalm 25

The Taizé Community is an ecumenical Christian monastic order in the village of Taizé, Burgundy, France. It is composed of about 100 brothers who come from Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox traditions, and from about 30 countries across the world.

Founded in 1940, only miles south of the separation line that divided a war-torn country in half, Taize became a sanctuary to countless war refugees seeking shelter. In order to respond to the variety of people and traditions, they created music and prayers where songs are sung in many languages -- chants and icons from the Western and the Eastern Orthodox tradition. This is what we have been singing today: music emphasizing simple repeated phrases, usually lines from Psalms or other pieces of Scripture. Repetition is what sinks the phrases into our being.

The community has grown to be a worldwide phenomenon, but still centered on a 100 brothers opening their home to pilgrims from all over the world. Brother Roger’s vision was a quest for a different expression of the Christian life, a way of assisting some of those most discouraged, those deprived of a livelihood; and it would become a place of silence and work with a strong devotion to peace and justice through prayer and meditation.

The Taize experience fits this last Sunday in Lent, because the gift of Lent is the ability to dance with God, back and forth in and out, through darkness and struggle, through surprise and joy, and all turns in between. The gift of prayer is an intimacy with Holiness. The gift of silence is the opening to seek the Kin-dom within, to acknowledge God’s claim on us and God’s yearning for our wholeness and wellness.

And the gift of the psalms is the recurrent call to faith and a persistent reminder of our dependence on God. Psalm 25 is a model prayer, a lament based on the cry of an individual, yet an acknowledgement that refuge is found in God. The Psalmist truly believes that God is working on his behalf as he lives his life. Why not, then, lift up the heart to God to pray to God for guidance and divine teaching, to ask God to remember us?

This Psalm is like a vigorous workout in the gym; after it is over our body brims with energy and we are ready to face whatever comes our way. We hear dependence on God for protection from enemies; requests for God to direct and teach; confession of sin and cries for forgiveness; and confidence in God's abiding presence and faithfulness. This is an individual’s cry, but .as early as v. 3, the singular subject is broadened to all those who wait for the Lord. The psalmist’s situation is related to the whole community of faithful. The emphasis is on learning God’s ways, God’s truths, God’s teaching, for they lead to salvation. The verb ‘remember’ or be mindful’ is mentioned three times. The psalmist asks the Lord to remember not his past, which is defined here by ‘sins’ and ‘transgressions’, but to release God’s own compassion and ‘love’. and ‘goodness’. This Psalm breathes an air of quiet confidence and hopefulness in the goodness, covenant

faithfulness and the guidance of God. The spirit of Psalm 25 is similar to that in Romans 8. Paul says, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" =

Life offers difficult situations, over and over. Life brings chaos, both in the world and within our selves. This chaos summons big disapproving words like "sinner" and "afflicted." It resonates in shame and blame and doubt and despair -- often abandonment. Psalms acknowledge this, but seem to realize that there must be equally big reserves of "kindness" and "forgiveness" and "compassion." To dance through life's chaos, confidence and faith are critical.

The two big words for kindness in Psalm 25 are "steadfast love" and "faithfulness". These give an eternal arc or dance to our interactions in the moment and our relationships in life. These allow us continued connection in the midst of stress and brokenness.

Imagine an angel on your left from the "steadfast love" wing and one on your right from the "faithfulness" wing of heavenly discourse. As they embrace one another through you, you find yourself "steadfastful."

Steadfast means firmly fixed in place: not subject to change; lasting and dependable. Faith is our firm belief or loyalty in something for which there is no proof it is a complete trust—Instead of faith being a fixed place, which can be so easily left behind simply by letting time go by, we find faith present in every place we find ourselves.

*Steadfastful* means that faith is not merely your holding on to God—it is God holding on to you – a God who will not let you go! God does God's work, and asks us to join her. God gave us a life and asks us to grow with him. Faith and works should travel side by side, step answering to step, like the legs of men walking. First faith, and then works; and then faith again, and then works again—until they can scarcely distinguish which is the one and which is the other.

Through the movement of sung prayer, the mindfulness of spoken prayer, the space of silent prayer, perhaps you might go forth in *steadfastness*. Lament is real. Faith is the corrective. *Steadfast* is the road toward Jerusalem.

Amen