**Sermon: Psalms of Asaph**

**Listening to Our Emotions/Listening to God**

This morning we are going to talk about emotions.

God’s emotions.

Our emotions.

BTW, just so you know, I am not a person particularly in touch with my emotions.

I have a very German father. Never cried. Did not show affection.

I have a stiff-upper-lip British mother, who barely cried when my Dad died.

(but… illustration from my Dad’s memorial service)

Let’s give a brief look at some of God’s emotions.

God has most of the emotions we have: joy, compassion, anger, hatred, jealousy, love, surprise, disgust, sadness, contentment.

Genesis 1:25,31 God saw that it was good… Very good. God feels a sense of accomplishment. He is content. He is delighted with what he had made. He is delighted with us.

But then just a few chapters later:

Genesis 6:6 The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.

God is hurt. God is disappointed. God feels regret. God is almost depressed here.

Exodus 20:5 I the Lord am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of their parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.

Yes, God feels jealousy. God does not feel envy (desire of what someone else possesses). But God feels jealousy (not wanting someone else to have what you have). Jealousy when we give our hearts to the world, to sin, to evil things.

Isaiah 49:15 Can a mother forget the baby at her breast, and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.

God feels deep compassion, like a mother for her baby.

Jeremiah 30:24 The fierce anger of the Lord will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart.

God feels anger. God feels the need for justice. Romans 12:19 “It is mine to avenge. I will repay.”

But almost immediately after Jeremiah 30:24 we have,

Jeremiah 31:3 I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.

Of course, God feels love. Arguably, this is the chief emotion God feels. Love is not just an emotion. Love is also a decision, a commitment, a loyalty. But love is a deep emotion, and God feels that emotion.

Then there is from a sermon last Spring:

Hosea 11:8 How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboyim? (sister cities to Sodom and Gomorrah) My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.

God feels a family-like loyalty. God feels deep compassion.

And then, of course, there is Jesus:

Mark 3:5 He (Jesus) looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.”

Jesus is feeling disappointment. Jesus is feeling impatient. Jesus is feeling anger.

But…

Luke10:21 At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said…

Jesus feels deep satisfaction when he is used by God to do something great. He is feeling deeply content.

And perhaps most famously of all:

Matthew 26:37-38 Jesus began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

Jesus felt overwhelmed with grief… a grief that bordered on fear.

There are emotions that we have that God does not have.

One of those is shame. Another is fear.

But even these things, God understands because he made us.

The book: “Ignoring our emotions is turning our back on reality. Listening to our emotions ushers us into reality. Emotions are the language of the soul.”

As a young Christian I was taught Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Of course, this passage is true. We cannot trust our feelings/emotions to tell us the essential truths about God.

I feel that God ought to do such and such…

I feel that God is telling me…

Also, we do not want to be completely controlled by our emotions.

But they do tell us about ourselves.

How about, “This is what I am feeling.”

EHS 67 I believe the greatest gift we can give the world is our true self living in loving union with God. How can we affirm other people’s unique identities when we do not affirm our own?

The story of Rabbi Zusya. When he was an old man, he said, “In the coming world they will not ask me: ‘Why were you not Moses?’ They will ask me, ‘Why were you not Zusya?’”

Let’s look at a person of God who is feeling a lot of emotions.

Q: Where would we look in the Bible to find people feeling and expressing a lot of emotion?

Psalms! (That is why I am not all that into Psalms)

Psalm 73, 74 Asaph. Asaph was David’s chief musician.

Psalm 73:1-12

Asaph is feeling envy (v. 3-4 no struggles, no burdens), but he is also feeling anger, both toward the wicked (v. 7-8 callous hearts, evil imaginations, malice, arrogance) and toward God (v. 11 Does the Most High know anything?). God, why aren’t you doing anything??!!

Asaph is human!

It is time to get real with God and real with yourself about what you are feeling and why you are feeling it.

Psalm 73:13-14

Asaph is feeling regret. Asaph is feeling disappointment. Asaph is feeling depressed. He is feeling hopeless.

Can you relate?

Is God angry with Asaph right now for feeling these things?

There is what you feel, and there is what you do with these feelings.

Psalm 74:1-11

v. 1-3 Asaph is feeling sadness. He is feeling rejected.

v. 4-8 Asaph is feeling fear as well.

v. 9-11 Asaph is feeling abandoned.

Is God angry at Asaph for feeling these things? Does God want him to feel these things?

Without suffering and anguish, there can be no joy.

Without a sense of loss and loneliness, the sense of satisfaction at finding love is not as deep.

But, as the author points out, if we suppress these emotions; if we do not embrace them, then we are not true to ourselves.

Now, go back to Psalm 73: 15-28

v. 15-17 I felt a lot of stuff. I acknowledged my feelings, but I did not let them take me too far into a bad place. Asaph brought his feelings to God.

I have spiritual disciplines in my life.

But then I came into your sanctuary. Then I understood. I was reminded of the truth about your enemies.

v. 18-20 I was brought back to my senses ad I remembered the truth.

v. 21-22 God, I was feeling some “stuff” I was grieved and I felt bitterness.

Grieved: good Bitter: bad

v. 23-26 But despite this, you, God, are always with me.

Asaph is feeling safe, protected. v. 25 Asaph is feeling desire for God.

v. 26 Asaph is feeling confident.

v. 27 Then Asaph is able to move past his negative emotions and remember the truth.

v. 28 Asaph is feeling great! Asaph is going to go out and share his faith.

(But remember the feeling great requires some of the former feelings)

Psalm 74:12-17

v. 12 But… Asaph had a quiet time.

Asaph is feeling confident. v. 16 The day and the night are yours!

Psalm 74:18-23 Asaph feeling confident. Asaph is feeling safe in God’s hands.

Asaph is bold! v. 22 Rise up, O God. Remember! v. 23 Don’t ignore

All of us want to feel these things. But all of us will also feel those other things.

We need one to feel the other.

EHS 67 I believe the greatest gift we can give the world is our true self living in loving union with God. How can we affirm other people’s unique identities when we do not affirm our own?

Let’s finish with David:

Psalm 139:14 I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. I know that full well.

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, God, and know my heart (and my emotions!). Test me and know my anxious (fearful, doubtful) thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me.