

Title: "The Inward Dimension"

Text: Psalm 42

We are continuing in our sermon series called "Living Faith in 3D."

- In essence, it's about discovering "how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ is,"
 - and coming to know and experience that love such that we are "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."
- That was the Apostle Paul's prayer for God's people 2000 years ago, and it still his prayer for God's people today.
- So we are exploring how to become answers to that prayer ourselves.
 - Living faith in 3D:
 - Upwardly in our relationship with God
 - Inwardly in our relationship to ourselves
 - and outwardly in relationship with others and with the world around us.

Last week we focused in on the "upward dimension" and looked at God Himself,

- and how God is 3 dimensional: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Today we are going to focus in on the "inward dimension" and how we humans are also multidimensional.

- Male and female God created us.
- Body, soul, and spirit God created us.

We just sang a lovely version of Psalm 42.

- Turn with me now to that psalm in the Old Testament,
 - and listen to Psalm 42 as it is written.

So what is this "soul" the psalmist is constantly referring to in this psalm?

- The psalm is only 11 verses long, but 6 times the psalmist speaks of his soul.
- And his soul is doing all kinds of things throughout the psalm.
 - His soul "pants" for God. His soul "thirsts" for God.
 - His soul is "poured out" before God.

- His soul is downcast and disturbed.
- His soul is also encouraged to hope in God.

What is this soul?

- Well, my friends, within the context of this sermon series, we might say that the soul is what makes human beings like you and me 3 dimensional.

Our human lives have an outer shape and form,
-which is the body and it's actions which are there for all the world to see.

But each one of us also has an inner world of the mind and of the will and of the heart,
-which is not immediately obvious or visible to the world at large.

I am standing here preaching today, and you are all sitting nicely in the pews listening.

- But it's also possible that as I am preaching, my mind is pre-occupied with what someone said to me in the hallway before the service,
- and it's possible that some of you are thinking about how the Patriots are going to do in the game against the Texans this afternoon
- and others are wondering what you're going to have for lunch later.

You see, what is going on in our interior world, and what we are visibly doing in our exterior world can be quite different.

- Your body can be present in one place, and your thoughts can be far away.

You also have emotions that are constantly at play.

- Some of you are sitting here in church looking calm and at peace,
- but internally you might be quite upset about something.
- Some of you might be grieving and sad.
- Others might be disappointed, or angry, or depressed.
- Some of us might be feeling overwhelmed by the amount of natural disasters that have hit Texas, and the Caribbean, and Florida, and Mexico in the past month.
- And some of us feel guilty that we have it seemingly so

easy here in New England and can't do enough to help.

We humans are multi-dimensional, you see, and complex.
-And all of that complexity of what makes us human beings,
-that combination of body, mind, will, emotions,
-that is what the biblical word "soul" is all about.

When God created human beings, Genesis 1 says God created us in his image.
-And Genesis 2 says that God breathed his breath into us and we became "living beings."

That Hebrew word for "living beings" is "nephesh."
-And it's actually the Hebrew word for "soul."
-It is the same word that the psalmist uses 6 times here in Psalm 42.

When God created humans in His image and breathed his breath of life into us, we became a "nephesh."
-We became a soul, a living being,
-a person with a mind that can think, and a will that can make choices, and emotions that can feel, and a body that can move.

And so when the Psalmist says that his soul pants and thirsts for God,
-he is saying that his whole being is longing for God.
When he says that his "soul" is downcast and disturbed within him,
-he means his whole person, all that he is, is upset and discouraged.

You see, the soul in the Bible is a comprehensive word.
-The soul is a 3D kind of word.
-Your soul is what makes you a human.
-And your soul is like the life center of your being.
-It is what integrates your body, your mind, your will, your emotions into the one whole person we call "You."

It is also what connects you in relationship to others:
-to other people, and to the world around you, and to God Himself, who made you "in His image."

And that is what we are going to focus on next week,
-the outward dimension of living faith in 3D.

But today is this “inward dimension.”

-And the psalmist says that his soul pants and thirsts for God
like a deer pants for streams of water.

We humans were uniquely made in God’s image to be in
relationship with God.

-God made us to be “souls” with the unique minds and the
ability to think,
-because God has the ability to think and He made us to be
able to commune with him with our minds.

-And God made us to be “souls” with a unique will of our own,
and the ability to make choices;
-because God has the ability to will and make choices and
made us to be able to commune with him freely by
choice of our will.

-And God made us to be “souls” with a unique heart, and the
ability to feel emotions,
-because God feels emotions and made us to be able to
commune with him with our hearts.

No other creature in all of creation was made to be a “soul”
like humans are made,
-for no other creature was intended to experience how wide
and long and high and deep the love of God is,
-as humans were.
-And no other creature was intended to respond to the love
of God with all of their heart and mind and soul and
strength as humans were.

And in the Garden of Eden it was a beautiful thing.

-We “living beings,” we humans were rightly related to God,
and to ourselves, and to the rest of creation.
-The upward and inward and outward dimensions of who we
are were all integrated and whole.

When the Bible says they “were naked and not ashamed,”
-it is a statement of how completely “whole” they were.

Their outer life and their inner life were all integrated.

-They weren't hiding anything.

-They were able to be up-front about what they were thinking and feeling and deciding.

-There was nothing they needed to be afraid of, or ashamed of.

So they were open to God, and open to each other, and in harmony with the creation around them.

Until all of a sudden they weren't.

-When Adam and Eve used their mind and their will and their emotions to actually break relationship with God,

-they actually ended up dis-integrating their souls.

-Their minds became darkened by sin,

-their wills became enslaved to self.

-their emotions became unruly and confusing.

-They hid from God, and covered themselves up before each other.

For the first time they knew fear and shame and guilt and remorse.

And ever since, with the psalmist, our human souls have thirsted for God like a deer thirsts for running water,

-because the upward dimension of our life is lacking.

-Our connection to God has been broken and we know we are missing something.

-We are missing a dimension of the life we were created for.

-So there is this unsatisfied appetite in us,

- a thirst for God that we can't quite assuage.

-St. Augustine wrote the famous line, "My heart is restless until it rests in Thee."

That which our soul is missing, that which our soul is hungering and thirsting for, is God Himself.

We were made for relationship with God, and when that relationship got broken,

-something in our soul went dry.

- We are still human beings. We have not lost our soul,
-so much as we have broken our soul.
-It is crippled.
- We still have the ability to think and reason,
-but my thoughts can be out of sync with the true intentions
of my will so that I lie, and put up false fronts, and flatter
with my mouth while thinking hateful thoughts.
- And we still have the ability to will and make choices,
-but my will can become enslaved to what my body wants
so that lust and addictions dominate my will.
- And we still have the ability to feel, but our feelings can
overwhelm our minds and will,
-and leave us a puddle of mush and unable to act,
-or lead us to act in rash ways that hurt others,
-or lead us to make choices that we know we shouldn't
make.

- You see, our broken souls are disquieted within us.
- They are hungering and thirsting for that 3rd dimension.
-They are hungering and thirsting for God.
-We need that upward dimension to break in to our lives
and to be our Savior and our Redeemer.
-We need Him to come and "restore our souls."

- The good news is, that in Jesus Christ, God has indeed done
just that.
- He has come and revealed Himself in all of His dimensions,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
-so that human beings might be restored in all of our
dimensions.

- And when you trust in what God has done for you in Christ,
-and offer your broken soul back to God,
-He gives you His Holy Spirit to come and dwell within you.
-And the Holy Spirit begins a restoration project to "restore
your soul."

- It doesn't happen overnight, but He begins to transform us
-by renewing our minds,
-and conforming our wills,
-and untangling our emotions,

-and in some cases healing our bodies.

And my friends, when that starts happening, we begin to experience just how wide and long and high and deep the love of God is.

We discover that the Spirit of God is able to actually touch every part of our being.

- There is no sin of ours so deep that the love of God can't go there and forgive it.
- There is no will of ours so stubborn that the love of God can't reshape it.
- There is no heart of ours so hard that the love of God can't soften it.
- There is no thought of ours so high that the love of God can't meet us there and connect with us.
- There is no emotion you have felt that God doesn't understand.
- His love can meet us everywhere.

And the more we open up the inward dimension of our lives to God,
-the more of His healing grace and love He pours into us.

But here's the thing: you and I are the keepers of our souls.

- We are the ones who need to keep them open to the love of God.
- And it's important that we pay attention to our souls.

How do we do that?

-Well, I want to encourage us to be like the psalmist here in Psalm 42: reflect on the state of your soul each day.

- One of the best ways I know to do this, is to take 10-15 minutes each day,
 - either at night before bed, or each morning when you wake up
 - to reflect on your last 24 hours, the day that is past.

And ask your soul like the psalmist, "Are you downcast, O my soul, and disturbed? Or are you thankful and hopeful?"

What events of the day that is past fed your soul?
-and what events drained your soul?
-What does that teach you about who you are, and how God has made you?

Did you have any experiences of beauty or connection with God or with some other person?
Did you have an experience of suffering in body, or mind, or relationship?
Was there a time when you felt a conflict within you,
-a conflict between your mind and your will,
-or between your body and your mind,
-or between your emotions and your will?

You see, the Psalmist here is reflecting on his life,
and he is paying attention to his soul.
-And he is thinking about the experiences he has recently had that have caused him pain,
-and that have left him discouraged.
-And he is inviting God to come and commune with his soul, and restore his hope, and give him faith, and pour out His love so that he might once again give thanks and praise His Savior and His God.

My friends, be a psalmist yourself this week.
-Be a steward of your soul, that "living being" that God uniquely created you to be.

Because to have a healthy soul that is being restored and redeemed by God
-matters more than the outcome of any circumstance in your life.

Only God can heal our souls,
-but as He continues that healing process in us,
-he invites us to cooperate with him so that the fullness of all that we are,
-might be filled to the measure of all the fullness of who He is.

Let us pray.