***Earnestly I seek You***

Psalm 63 & Rooted

It is good to be back with you today. My family and I have been off and away for a couple weeks – which was great – and now it’s great to be back.

Janet, Olivia, Carter and I have been here now for a bit more than a year, and we continue to thank God for the grace of coming to Lambrick. We love you – our church – and are so thankful for what God is doing among us…

 And this morning, I want to take hold of the unique **moment** that this is – this *end-of-the-summer-before-everything-gets-going-again* moment. Right? This is *that time of the year* for many of us, isn’t it?

We all call **Jan 1st** “New Years” day, but, really, this time of year is much more like the beginning of the new year, for many of us. Most of our lives are still shaped somewhat, if not largely*,* by the rhythm of the school year – whether or not we’re in school or have kids in school.

Which means **this is really** **the time** when many of us – most of us – are making **decisions, real decisions**, about how we are going to spend the coming season and year. How we are going to spend our days and weeks and evenings and weekends – and make time for it all – for work, for family, for school, for friends, for small group, or exercise, or biking, or book club…

And so as we look toward this new year and how we are going to spend it, I want to ask you about **today**…

***Why are you here? Why are you here – at church – today?***

Why did you get up to come to church this morning? Why do some of us come to church week after week? This is a significant rhythm and commitment in many of our lives, so it’s important for us to talk about it… **Why are you here this morning?**

Whatever your answer, can I suggest, that underneath all of our reasons, we are here today because, in some way, ***we are all thirsty for God.***

If not, ***we wouldn’t be here* at church**. We’d still be in bed, or off doing other things. ***But we wouldn’t be here***…

***But we are here*** – because, on some level, every one of us is **thirsty for God** – for God’s grace, God’s touch, God’s nearness, God’s wisdom… **To know** God more, to hear His voice, to know that He’s near, to know His peace/His Presence in the midst of the storm we’re facing… to know His Heart in the midst of our questions… Or to find out ***how to*** know Him, hear His voice, and seek and find life in Him…

We are all, on some level, thirsty for God.

**Why..? Why are we thirsty for God?**

Well, at the most basic level – which is what undergirds it all – we’re thirsty for God because God has created us to thirst for Him. Just like the body was designed to require air for survival, our soul – and by that I don’t mean just some little emotional corner of our heart – but our whole being – was made to be alive with God…

We were made to experience life **with God** – on every level – and so, as Augustine famously wrote, “*Our hearts are restless till they find their rest in God*…”

We’re thirsty for God because God has created us to thirst for Him. It’s just basic to being alive – and especially to being alive in the Spirit. Truth is, the Spirit, satisfies our thirst and, in so doing, makes us even more thirsty for God.

So, that’s the beautiful theological reason for our being thirsty.

But on a more experiential level, a more biographical level, our thirst is stirred up by a number of things.

For some of us, we’re thirsty because we’ve experienced God and this has… ***God has*** created a thirst in us for more. Maybe it was years ago, in our teens, or our college days, in a small group, Young Life or at Alpha. We can remember a time when God was **so** present, **so** real, **so** active in us, around us, even through us. And we thirst for more…

For some of us maybe, it’s **an ongoing thing**. We’ve experienced God time and again - and this has… ***God has*** stirred in us a hunger, a thirst, a craving for more – as a way of life…

For some of us, we’re thirsty for God **not** because we’ve experienced God at some point, but because ***we’ve encountered others*** who have or who do… We’ve known or know someone or some people who are **alive with God**, hungry for God, and **this** has stirred in us a hunger, a thirst for God – to know Him ***for ourselves…***

For some of us, we’re thirsty for God, desperate for God because we have become incredibly **aware** that our lives are dry and weary without God, that we’re unsatisfied with life as we know it… and we long for something more – and on a certain level we know that this more is God…

And lastly, (and this may name reality for a number of us) some of us are hungry for God because **it’s been a long time** since we’ve known His Presence, His Touch, His Voice. And the absence of this experience makes us ache for God today… If we’re honest, we probably wouldn’t say that we’re hungry for God – but that *we’re hungry to be hungry again for God…*

Whatever the case, we are all here today, because, on some level, **we are all thirsty for God.**

And so I want to conclude our summer study in the Psalms, as we stand in this moment looking into the coming season and year, by inviting us to reflect on a single verse in a psalm that seems fitting for today.

If you have a Bible with you, turn with me to **Psalm 63:1**. And hear the prayer of the psalmist – who in this case, is a well-known character in the biblical record: a man named **David**.

**Psalm 63:1.** He prays…

*You, God, are my God,*

*earnestly I seek you;*

*I thirst for you,*

*my whole being longs for you,*

*in a dry and parched land*

*where there is no water.*

Let me read that again for us from another translation. And listen – listen to how your own soul responds to this prayer…

This time from the ESV.

*O God, you are my God;*

*earnestly I see you;*

 *my soul thirsts for you;*

 *my flesh faints for you,*

*as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*

That declaration at the center of this verse is the truth of all of our lives. It is **how** God has made us – *I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you.*

Which isn’t to say that we are all or always **aware** of our thirst.

Truth is, some of us are **very aware** that we have ***little******to no*** thirst for God these days… We hunger **little** for God these days…

*That’s why we are here this morning…*

Some of us **know**/we ***feel*** the reality that **we aren’t thirsty**. Or at least ***not enough***.

**But let’s probe that thought.** *Does not the reality of this awareness – the reality that we’re aware of our lack of thirst, tell us that, on some level,* ***we do*** *in fact thirst – for God…?*

As the psalmist says: ***Our soul thirsts for God. Our flesh faints for Him. Our whole being longs for Him.***

We just don’t always feel it – or realize it.

I’m sure many of us have prayed the prayer – or ached the ache – “***O God,* *I long to long for you… Make me thirsty for you****”.*

It’s a prayer that comes as a confession – a hard and humbling confession. But in praying this confession, as we grieve our lack of spiritual hunger, we need to take comfort in the reality that this pray is itself ***the prayer of a thirsty heart.***

We are only ever aware of our lack of thirst because, on some level, **we thirst**… Because on some level, in some way, the Spirit of God is present and at work, making us thirsty…

 ***Otherwise we wouldn’t be here.***

So let me just say: **I’m glad you’re here this morning**, cause it indicates to me something of your thirst for God.

**But here’s the deeper question.** *The question that this*

*Psalm asks…*

* ***What are we doing with our thirst?***
* ***What are you and I doing with our hunger, our thirst for God?***
* ***What will we do with our souls deep hunger for God in the coming days, weeks, months, season, and year?***

Listen again to **the psalmist** with me.

Note that David doesn’t just say, “*I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you.”*

No, he says, “*You, God are my God,* ***earnestly I seek you****…”*

The reality of his thirst and his awareness of it led David to **seek God**… and to do so ***earnestly***.

And before we run off to google a definition for the word “earnestly”, the Hebrew word is literally “***early***”. (Which doesn’t need a dictionary!)

***Early I seek You*.**

In other words, ***before anything and everything else***.

Even though the psalmist is in the wilderness, fighting for his life in practical ways – his urgent pursuit is **God**. Which is probably why translators end up using the word “earnestly”.

He’s saying, “Whatever else it going on… Whatever it takes, I’m going to seek You. Even if I have to get up early. Cause I can’t live without you – *I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”*

***I seek You… Early I seek You… Earnestly I seek You…***

Can we pause and simply read this verse aloud together?

*You, God, are my God,*

*earnestly I seek you;*

*I thirst for you,*

*my whole being longs for you,*

*in a dry and parched land*

*where there is no water.*

I’ll be honest, over the years, often around this time of the year, I have come back to this Psalm and taken it as my daily prayer – as I have again recently – sometimes out of a deep palpable felt longing for God, and other times out of a deep awareness of my ***lack*** of a palpable longing for God.

Either way, I’ve come back to this Psalm – praying it often.

I can think of one season in particular where I sought to make this the first prayer of my day… the ***first words*** that I would recite in my heart and mind while lying silently in my bed, and then later when I’d finally sit in solitude and speak it out loud – in my office or car…

“*You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you. I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you in a dry and parched land where there is no water…”*

And I’ve done this – **I do this** – because I know that **I need** again and again to have **my** heart and mind awakened to the hunger of my soul for God… the longing of my very being – for God… My essential **need** for God and His Spirit’s work in me and through me…

**AND** **my need** to **do something about it** – to do something about my hunger, my thirst, my need for God – ***to seek God******earnestly****.*

That word “earnestly” is often the one that gets me… sometimes like a God-ordained kick in the butt – calling to me, **searching** me:

*Can I say this before God? Honestly?*

*Am I seeking God* ***earnestly****?*

***Will I****… Will I seek God earnestly – this day, this week, this fall, this year?*

*“You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you;*

*I thirst for You, my whole being longs for you,*

*in a dry and parched land where there is no water…*

***So what about you? What about us?***

In the knowledge that we are all thirst for God – in the depth of our being – ***what are we doing with our thirst for God?***

As you and I stand at the beginning of a new year, as we consider the commitments we are making or will make this fall and this year, ***what are we going to do with our hunger for God?***

*How will we seek to* ***satisfy*** *our thirst?*

*How will we seek to* ***cultivate*** *our thirst?*

*How will* ***you*** *seek to satisfy and cultivate* ***your*** *thirst in the coming days and season?*

Cause the danger is that we’d **do nothing**, right? [As I’m sure many of us have done before.] The danger is that we’d choose **not** to seek God, **not** to cultivate and satisfy our thirst for God with God.

**Not by** explicitly ***choosing*** ***not*** to seek God (though that’s possible), but by **explicitly choosing everything else**.

Maybe this is why this word **earnestly** matters so much. Or the more literal translation – **early**.

**Early** I will seek you. **Earnestly** I will seek you.

***Before*** *everything else.* ***Over*** *everything else.*

But not ***alongside*** everything else.

Because we can’t do everything **earnestly**.

Maybe that’s why some of us feel a lack of hunger and thirst for God these days. Because its been a long time since we chosen to seek God **earnestly**… **early**…

And by that I don’t mean **first in our day**, but ***first* *in our heart***, ***first on our list***, ***first in our life***.

This is what Moses called the Israelites to in some of his final words in Deuteronomy. **Deuteronomy 30:19f**…

*“This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses.* ***Now choose life,*** *so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice and hold fast to him.* ***For the LORD is your life****…”*

 Hear those final words: “***For the LORD is your life***.”

***Not just another thing in your life. Nor even the most important thing in your life. No. He is your very life itself…***

*“For the LORD is your life.”*

 ***“You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you.”***

Which for some of us may begin with taking the prayer of Psalm 63:1 as our prayer in the coming days and weeks – seeking God to awaken or renew our hunger for Him – a hunger that can only be satisfied by Him…

**But listen church – I want more than that for you – for me – for all of us. I want more than to simply invite you to pray a psalm** (though I think that would be wise for many of us).

As your pastor and brother in Christ, I don’t want to just exhort you to seek Christ this year. **I want to do whatever I can to help you and us actually do it.** To see us take some real steps and grow as individuals and a community seeking and following Jesus in a real and life-giving way this year…

And not just those of us who’ve found our way to the elusive core of Lambrick, but every one of us. *Every person sitting in this room today, and every person who will join us in the coming days…* Every college student who’s going to step through our doors, ever teenager in our youth group, every person at Lambrick young and old…

And with this in mind, I’ve been praying – probably since I arrived at Lambrick – for ways to help us move from lots of ***good intentions*** to *a* ***real pursuit of Christ***… from a “**good luck**” approach to discipleship and community to **an intentional and explicit pathway** for everyone of us to be invited into and enter into the pursuit of Christ in community.

And as I lean in, I hear this heartbeat ***among us.*** As a church, we want to see and help more people enter into a real and living relationship with Christ – to become disciples of Jesus, to become a part of the family and body of Christ, and to find their lives drawn into God’s everyday redemptive work in the world.

**Which is why all these boxes are up here** – filled with a couple hundred **guidebooks** to take us on **a discipleship journey** as a community this fall.

In truth, what’s in these boxes is just a personal discipleship workbook called **Rooted** – and a guide for facilitating **Rooted** **groups**.

Nothing to get that excited about.

And in case you’re thinking it, let me just say it: **Workbooks don’t make disciples. Programs don't make disciples.**

But here’s the good news: **Jesus does!**

**And His disciples do** – when they come together – when **we** together to intentionally pursue Christ together.

And that is what the **Rooted** journey is all about… That is what the **Rooted** journey will invite us into this fall.

It’s a **10-week journey** – that will take a **real commitment** on our part – on your part and mine – everyone who signs on for Rooted.

Think of it as a **discipleship bootcamp**!

It will involve **a daily practice** – about 20 minutes of personal study and prayer 5 days a week (3 days a week for the teens)… And committing to be a part of a **weekly Rooted small group** that will meet to share in the journey and pray for one another… On **Sunday mornings** our teaching will explore the themes on another level… And at three points along the way, there will be a **group experience** or **challenge** meant to catalyze growth…

Which may feel unrealistic or ridiculous to some of us – I know it does *at times* to me. But here’s my deeper conviction: **nothing changes if we just continue to do more of the same**. Sometimes it takes a catalyst like this to really lead us into a new chapter.

And I think we’re hungry for this and need this – not for a program – but for a way to put our intentions, our vision into action and truly create a pathway for everyone at Lambrick to grow together in the pursuit of Christ…

***To go deeper with God… to go deeper in community with one another… and to be drawn more deeply into God’s purposes for our lives – for the good of others.***

Which again, feels really daunting – by what Rooted will mean for us (and for me as a leader)…

But deeper than that, ***I think I need this and want this*** – because ***I’m hungry*** to grow with you – to grow in Christ, to grow in community (beyond Sunday), and to grow as agents of God’s influence in our world…

Not that Rooted won’t cover some basics. Truth is, it will. But that's ok, because sometimes we all need to revive the basics, and with that, to help another learn and grow from the ground up. Honestly, I’m ok covering the basics again if it helps another person learn and grow. And I think that’s where I often end up growing anyways – as I grapple again with something alongside and for the sake of another… God meets me there.

In the coming weeks, we’ll be talking more about this – as we work to raise up a whole team of Rooted group **facilitators** and **host** **homes** and try to **create space for everyone** to be a part of this – with the aim to launch into **Rooted** at the start of **October**.

If you are already a part of a small group or some sort of bible study group, we want to **invite** you to do Rooted this fall – and possibly to divide up into a few groups for the fall so you can invite in a crowd of others – so that everyone can be a part of a Rooted group.

Or if you’d be open to **hosting** a Rooted group, or be a group **facilitator**, or simply to help **make Rooted a great success**, we’d love to talk with you or hear from you.

We’ll be getting out some info on Rooted in the coming days – so watch for it…

------------ **But let me close by asking you one last time:**

***Are you thirsty for God?***  Are you thirsty to know God more, to experience Him, His kingdom and will this fall? Are you thirsty to see this happening in the lives of others, in and through this church?

If yes, **how thirsty are you?**

*Thirsty enough to do something about it?*

*Thirsty enough to begin to seek God earnestly* – with and for others?

I hope so… **Cause that’s what I’m praying for you** – for us all… For God to make us thirsty – more thirsty than we’ve ever been – that we might seek Him earnestly… and experience Him deeply together this year.

*“You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you;*

*I thirst for You, my whole being longs for you,*

*in a dry and parched land where there is no water…*

***---------------------- benediction***

*O God, I have tasted Your goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need for further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire.*

*O Triune God, I want to want You; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made more thirsty still.*

*Show me Your glory, I pray, that so I may know You as You truly are. Begin in mercy a new work of love within me.*

*Say to my soul, “Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.”*

*Then give me grace to rise and follow You up from this misty lowland where I have wandered so long.*

*In the beautiful name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.*

 [AW Tozer, The Pursuit of God]