

Guest Editorial

Perplexed, Amazed, Inspired, and Challenged

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Have you seen one of those photos or videos taken from the international space station, one of our earth spinning through space like a ball in a haze of white and blue? If you haven't, go to the NASA website and have a look. The videos and pictures are breathtaking. They also give us a *rare* perspective; one we do not get to see when we are positioned in our particular corners of the world. In his two essays, Jennings sets out to give an account of the Spirit's work in history and in today's world, one might say, as God would see it. Kreitzer provides an insightful prescription for refocusing our understanding of God's triune, fatherly character, correcting skewed notions that have arisen historically from "contextualization gone awry." Just like a snapshot from space, this sort of reading gives a much needed, counter-intuitive outlook. I found myself gravitating towards a Psalm that always humbles, inspires and charges me all at once, particularly when I need to find my bearings in my call. It is Psalm 145. Let me highlight four ways I find perspective through a re-reading of Psalm 145 through the lens of these essays.

First, Psalm 145 is full of humble praise in unassuming appreciation of the greatness of God. *I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever.... Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise, his greatness no one can fathom* (Psalm 145:1,3). As the rest of that psalm and many other psalms show, God is pretty awesome, people. What an easy thing to forget. As the psalmist here is doing, one just needs to reflect for a moment on anything and think, how did God do that? Similarly, these essays call us to see that God's work through his Spirit in contemporary times is nothing short of amazing and surprising, particularly against a background of the limitations that could have hindered God's work. We live in a terribly pessimistic world. I have found that cynicism—the kind of negativity that only sees what is wrong in the world and appraises people's actions primarily in terms of self-interest—is so pervasive, it is becoming increasingly hard to see what is good about our world. Consequences of societal cynicism include an escalating crisis of mental illness, depression, and in the extreme suicide and homicide. For those of us engaged in serving others, cynicism causes discouragement and lethargy, which robs us of inspiration to serve others, wherever we are placed. Psychologists have written that one way to overcome depressive tendencies is to keep a daily journal of gratitude. That is a profoundly scriptural idea: *Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever* (Psalm 107: 1). *Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will in Christ Jesus Christ* (1 Thess 5:18). Gratitude is like sunshine to the soul. It takes attention from ourselves, from our problems and challenges, and reminds us that God is in control, and that indeed we have a lot to celebrate, another profoundly biblical idea. And it is what these essays do, to reflect back so that we can look forward with joyful awareness. They are like a rearview mirror into recent history, a journey of historical discernment of God's plan and foreknowledge of his mission in the world. There is a tendency to feel that recent, modern developments have happened in a "God vacuum." Far from the truth; God continues to work in the world's developments to advance his purposes, and our task is to discern both the redemptive opportunities and the dark shadows of these developments as part of our witness. So, let's look back with gratitude, which in turn inspires faith.

Second, for the psalmist in Psalm 145, amazement at God's work also inspires humility, another cord that runs throughout this issue's essays. *The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love* (Psalm 145:8). God is concerned with all the peoples of the earth. God loves all people and, in time, creates circumstances for all people to find their way to him. While we do not understand all the evil and tragedies and limitations in our world, we recognize the overriding fact that God is good. This goodness is demonstrated in Jesus's own coming to earth, his life and sacrifice, as explored in essay two. In his incarnation—coming to live as a man confined to a particular culture yet once and for all offered a sacrifice for our sins (Hebrews 10:12), and then sending his Spirit to continue his work on earth, Jesus has newly identified with those who suffer and are in humble circumstances. Jesus is the Suffering Servant prophesied by Isaiah. Likewise, humility not only leads us to praise and gratitude, it also leads us to recognize responsibility and opportunity, in a new way, in a way that we are dependent on the Spirit of God, which then inspires fresh confidence, for then it is not us who live, but Christ who lives in us (Galatians 2:20), and wills and acts according to his good purpose within us (Philippians 2:13).

Third, the psalmist also sees that awareness of God at work and humility leads us to sense our own responsibility to continue the work that God is doing, as though we are caught up in God's own action. *One generation commends your work to another; they tell of your mighty acts. They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty.... They tell of the power of your awesome works.... They celebrate your abundant goodness....* (Psalm 145:4-7). When we read these essays, just as with the psalmist, we reflect on the glorious splendor of God's majesty, and meditate on his wonderful works, proclaim his great deeds, celebrate his abundant goodness—but it doesn't end there. We get this feeling that we've got to share this good news with others. For me, one Old Testament passage that is resonant in this regard comes from 2 Kings 7, after Samaria had been besieged and nearly starved by the Assyrians. It's been drama, drama and more drama, and the day when God routs the enemy and they flee, leaving all they've got behind. Four lepers, having nothing to lose, go out to beg for food and discover all this abandoned loot. They take as much as they need for themselves and then say to each other, *We are not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves—let's go out and tell!* (2 Kings 7:3-10, paraphrased). I like to think of the various tasks of sharing the love of God this way: this is so good, it has so changed my, our lives, we cannot keep it to ourselves! The world is hurting, in need of something we already have; we've gotta go out and share... *in invitation, in social care, in bringing justice—whatever, just go out and help someone else get what you've got!* This is a day of good news—*Oh how lovely on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who announce peace, who bring good news of happiness, who announce salvation, and say to the world, your God reigns!*" (Isaiah 52:7, paraphrased).

Fourth in the Psalm is the theme of continuity. *Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations* (Psalm 145:13). Continuity of God's mission runs through these essays, from the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, through the centuries to our day. For starters, God's ongoing mission is itself a cause to be humble—our part is significant, but it is also miniscule. But also, the world, with all its problems, is no match for God. He's got this. No matter what. We do have to be faithful in our generation; in fact, this is why we should be faithful in our generation, to pass on the baton, the deposit that has been entrusted to us, to the next generation. There is no rocket science to what we've gotta do—*Each one of you should serve with whatever gift you have received from God, acting as a faith steward*

of God's grace in its various forms (1 Peter 4:10). And according to Paul, *We are God's handiwork* (or masterpiece), *created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*; (Ephesians 2:10). Also, we are God's workers: *We are co-workers in God's (in) God's field, God's building* (I Corinthians 3:9). Furthermore, none of us is working in isolation: *By the grace God has given me*, Paul says, *I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it* (1 Corinthians 3:10). Paul further explains in 1 Corinthians 3:5-7 about his ministry in relation to Apollos: *One plants the seeds, another waters, another will harvest, but in it all, God makes it all grow*. There it is again—God is making things grow. God is at work. And so we hear the echo of the Psalmist again: *The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does* (Psalm 145:13b).

God's mission. Something we are so deeply caught up in. It is amazing, perplexing, inspiring, and challenging. Read, and reflect, with gratitude, with humility, with obligation, and also with faith, then go out and do what you've been prepared to do.