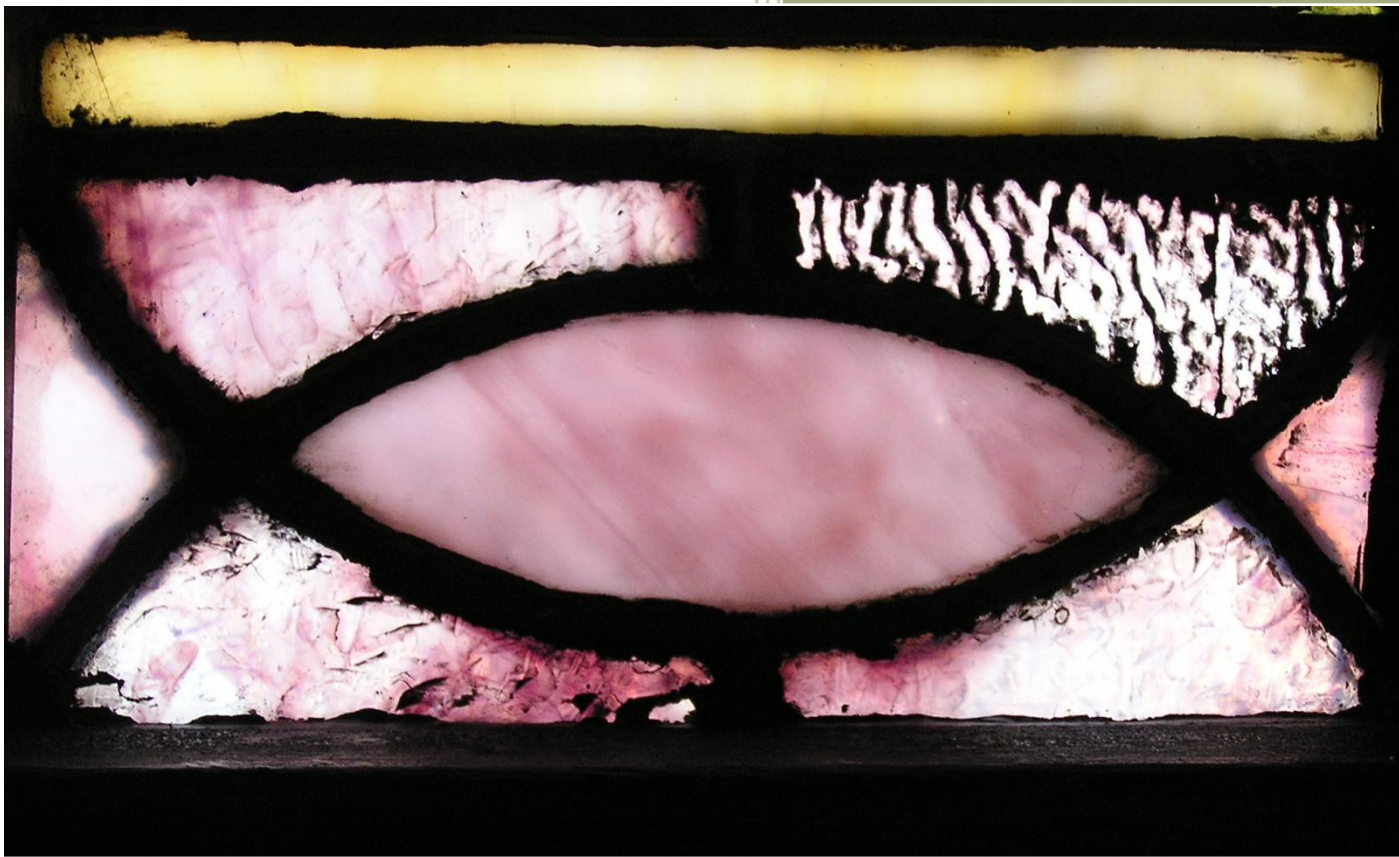


2011
Lenten
Devotional

Praying the Psalms



Oakmont Presbyterian Church

During the upcoming season of Lent you are invited to begin praying through the Psalms as part of your daily spiritual discipline preparing for Easter. To that end our congregation's Lenten Devotional booklet this year offers a psalm, meditation, and prayer each day for you to spend time with individually or with others. In the pages to follow you will find an article, from pastor Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York, with useful suggestions on how to pray your way through the Psalms as well as an introduction to the Psalms by Dennis Bratcher. These same psalms were very much in Jesus' heart and upon his lips as he made his way to Jerusalem in the weeks before his crucifixion, death and resurrection. I invite you to enter into that same journey with him as you take time during Lent to consider God's call upon your life, and how you have, and will, answer him.

Peace,
Brad Walters

Lent 2011



Exploring Prayer Again

Sunday Morning Worship—8:15 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.

- March 13 *Why Pray*
- March 20 *Listening to God in Prayer*
- March 27 *Praying for Others as Jesus Did*
- April 3 *Praying When Life Hurts*
- April 10 *When God Does Not Answer Your Prayer*

Ash Wednesday Worship, March 9, (7:30 p.m.), no supper served

Wednesday Suppers (6:30 p.m.) and Worship Services (7:00 p.m.)

- March 16 Vegetable Soup, Prayer of Examen
- March 23 Pasta Fagioli Soup, ACTS Prayers
- March 30 Ham & Bean Soup, Compline Prayer
- April 6 Asiago Bisque Soup, Taize Prayer
- April 13 Chili, Prayers for Wholeness and Healing

Mid-day Prayer, Monday-Friday, (Noon – 12:20 p.m.), OPC Sanctuary

Holy Week Worship: worship only, no suppers served

- Maundy Thursday, April 21 (7:30 p.m.) and
- Good Friday, April 22,
- Oakmont Methodist Church (Noon) and OPC Sanctuary (8:00 p.m.)

Praying the Psalms by Rev. Tim Keller

1. **"The Psalms teach us to pray through imitation and response...**Real prayer is always an answer to God's revelation. The Psalms are BOTH prayer and revelations about God the perfect ideal soil for learning prayer.
2. **The Psalms take us deep into our own hearts** 1000 times faster than we would ever go if left to ourselves...Religious/moral people tend to want to deny the rawness and reality of their own feelings, especially the darkness of them...The secular world has almost made an idol of emotional self-expression...But the Psalmists neither 'stuff' their feelings nor 'ventilate' them. They *pray* them—they take them into the presence of God until they change or understand them.
3. **Most importantly, the Psalms force us to deal with God as He is, not as we wish he was.** 'Left to ourselves, we will pray to some god who speaks what we like hearing, or to the part of God we manage to understand. But what is critical is that we speak to the God who speaks to us, and to everything He speaks to us...the Psalms train us in that conversation.' (quote from Eugene Peterson's Answering God)' "

Additional Note: The Imprecatory Psalms can be confusing with their cries for vengeance upon Israel's or the psalmist's enemies. "Basically, realize that calls for justice are absolutely right, and remind us how important God's holiness and justice are. But secondly, recognize that the Psalmists did not have the justice of God completely satisfied in Christ. Thus we pray for our enemies, not wish them ill. Yet we as Christians can pray these Psalms as longings for social justice and hatred against the 'power and principalities' behind the world." *Quotes from Dr Tim Keller's January 2006 MCM teaching notes, c2006, used with permission.*

Suggestions:

1. **Try to understand a psalm before praying it.** A commentary is particularly helpful to understand the context of the Psalm. What was the Psalmist going through when he wrote this particular Psalm? The Psalms also point to Christ. Where might this psalm fit into His life?
2. **Linger over a Psalm.** Is there a particular verse that is particularly relevant to your life right now? Chew on it. Read it aloud over and over, with a different emphasis on each word. Why is this word chosen or important here? What difference would this make in my life if I believed this with all my heart? If I applied this to my life? Pray for yourself and others from it.
3. **Use the Psalms to praise God** for different aspects of His character.

Introducing the Psalms

Dennis Bratcher

The Psalms are some of the most widely read portions of the Old Testament. They have a long history of popularity in the Christian tradition, so much so that often the Book of Psalms has been bound with the New Testament in pocket editions. Such popularity reflects sensitivity to the fact that the psalms are about people, the struggle and joy of living life under God. While too often the psalms are seen as a sort of spiritual "pick-me-up," a view reflecting the distorted "feel-good" mentality of modern society, their message goes far deeper addressing the entire range of human existence.

It is important to recognize that the psalms are not doctrinal statements, creeds, or history but that they are both poetry and prayer, poetry intended to be set to music and prayed in worship. In ancient Israel, no less than in the modern world, poetry and music were the means by which people expressed the deepest of human feelings and emotions, the most profound of insights, and the most tragic and joyous of human experiences. It is no accident that after Israel's deliverance from Egypt on the banks of the Reed Sea the people sang (Exod. 15:1-18)! Or that Hannah lapses into song at the dedication of Samuel (1 Sam. 2:1-10; note Lk. 1:46-55)! Or that David mourns Saul and Jonathan in a beautiful poetic elegy (2 Sam. 2:19-27). Much of the language of the Psalms is metaphorical and symbolic, the language of the poet.

The Psalter, as the Book of Psalms is often called, is actually a collection of different kinds of poetry spanning many centuries of history (from c. 1100 BC, Pss. 29, 68, to c. 400 BC, Ps. 119) and reaching essentially its present form around 300 BC. Evidences of the collective nature of the Psalter are seen in its division into five 'books' (for example, Ps. 72:20), the references to various authors (for example, Psalm 89), as well as the different time periods represented (Ps. 137 is clearly from the period of Exile, c. 550 BC).

There are four basic collections within the Psalter: the Davidic collections (3-41, 51-70, 108-110, 138-145), the Asaph Psalms (73-83), the Korah Psalms (42, 44-49, 84-85, 87-88), and the Songs of Ascent (120-134), to which might be added the Hallel, or Praise (doxology), Psalms (113-118, 146-150). Although the exact process of compilation is not known, a comparison can be drawn between the Psalter and hymnbooks of today. Hymnals contain many different types of songs written by different people in different countries over a period of centuries, preserved within a particular community because they communicate a truth in a memorable way. In this way, songs like Charles Wesley's *And Can It Be* have become important confessions of faith. So the Psalter grew out of the life of a community of faith as the people used their songs and poetry to worship God.

David is traditionally seen as the author of most of the psalms. Yet, it is better to understand the Psalter, not primarily in terms of individual authorship, but as the product of this community of faith who composed, collected, and passed on their prayers, hymns,

songs, and liturgy as a witness to their experience as the people of God. While there were obviously authors of these poems, someone who actually put the words on paper (or animal hides), the significance of the psalms lies not in who wrote them, but in what they communicate about God's revelation of Himself to His people and the people's response to Him. Even then, given what we know about ancient cultures, the writings were likely rearranged, added to, edited, and expanded across the centuries. This makes the modern notion of "author" not really relevant to these writings.

Even though there is a wide diversity of material in individual psalms, they can be grouped by style and content into three basic categories. Most psalms within a certain category follow a similar pattern. **Lament psalms** are the most numerous. These psalms are a cry to God from distress, pain or sorrow, either from the individual (13, 22) or the community (74). Often they begin with the question "Why?" and end in an affirmation of faith in God from the midst of the pain.

Thanksgiving psalms express thanks and praise to God in response to some action or circumstance in which God's faithfulness and love have been experienced (18, 138, 107).

Hymns offer praise to God simply for who He is, as Creator of the Universe and Lord of History (8, 66, 113).

Other types of psalms are: **Salvation History psalms** celebrating God's saving actions on behalf of His people (105-106), **Songs of trust** affirming God's faithfulness (23, 131), **Wisdom psalms** extolling the merits of the wise life (36, 73), and **Liturgical psalms** used in public ceremonies or services of worship (2, 50, 122).

The psalms were used by the Israelites in the context of worship to provide a structure in which they could bring their praises, thanks, hurts and grief honestly and openly before God. The Psalms were not thundered from Sinai or received in a vision. They are the prayers and praises of God's people preserved by the community of faith. As such, they have become authoritative for us: a guide for worship, an example of honesty before God, and a demonstration of the importance of prayer and meditation.

Wednesday, March 9 ~ Ash Wednesday

Psalm 5

¹Give ear to my words, O LORD; give heed to my sighing.

²Listen to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you I pray.

³O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch.

⁴For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil will not sojourn with you.

⁵The boastful will not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers.

⁶You destroy those who speak lies; the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful.

⁷But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house, I will bow down toward your holy temple in awe of you.

⁸Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me.

⁹For there is no truth in their mouths; their hearts are destruction; their throats are open graves; they flatter with their tongues.

¹⁰Make them bear their guilt, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; because of their many transgressions cast them out, for they have rebelled against you.

¹¹But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, so that those who love your name may exult in you.

¹²For you bless the righteous, O LORD; you cover them with favor as with a shield.

In 1932, musician Thomas A. Dorsey experienced a shock. While singing in a revival meeting, he received a telegram saying his wife had just died in childbirth. A few days later, anguished and depressed, he sat down at a piano. As he toyed with the keys, a song emerged: "Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand. I am tired, I am weak, I am worn. Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light. Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home." Today, Dorsey is considered the father of gospel music and "Precious Lord" is considered one of the greatest gospel songs ever.

Like “Precious Lord,” Psalm 5 is a prayer for help and refuge in times of trouble. As he had done in earlier psalms, David began by describing his situation. He felt discouraged and was waiting in faith for God to act (vv. 1–3). In his prayer, he described not only his own state but the “state of God” as well: God loves righteous and humble people, but abhors and judges the proud, dishonest, and violent (vv. 4–6).

Because of God’s character, David had a valid basis for confidence that God was on his side (vv. 7–12). He was humble and worshipful. He honored God’s loving kindness, sought His presence, pursued righteousness with His help, and tried to live blamelessly before his enemies. They, on the other hand, were untrustworthy, destructive, deceitful, and malicious. In a striking metaphor, their throats are compared to open graves (v. 9). They were on the side of death, not life. David loved God’s justice so much that he boldly called on Him to judge and punish such people. In the meantime, he would remain safe and glad, enjoying God’s favor and praising His blessings (cf. Ps. 30:5).

Heavenly Father, sometimes we pray to You with sighs that words cannot express, but You understand our heart’s cry. We thank You for leading us with Your loving hand upon our lives. Lead us in the way of righteousness and peace. Protect us from our enemies and those who would try to draw us away from You and the narrow road upon which You would have us walk. Fill us with joy as we honor our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ today. Amen

Thursday, March 10

Psalm 27

¹The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

²When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh— my adversaries and foes— they shall stumble and fall.

³Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

⁴One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.

⁵For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.

⁶Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

⁷Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!

⁸“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, LORD, do I seek.

⁹Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!

¹⁰If my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will take me up.

¹¹Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.

¹²Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence.

¹³I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

¹⁴Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

“The Lord is my light and my salvation.” Here is personal interest, “my light,” “my salvation;” the soul is assured of it, and therefore declares it boldly. Into the soul at the new birth divine light is poured as the precursor of salvation; where there is not enough light to reveal our own darkness and to make us long for the Lord Jesus, there is no evidence of salvation. After conversion our God is our joy, comfort, guide, teacher, and in every sense our light: he is light within, light around, light reflected from us, and light to be revealed to us. Note, it is not said merely that the Lord gives light, but that he is light; nor that he gives salvation, but that he is salvation; he, then, who by faith has laid hold upon God, has all covenant blessings in his possession. This being made sure as a fact, the argument drawn from it is put in the form of a question, “Whom shall I fear?” A question which is its own answer. The powers of darkness are not to be feared, for the Lord, our light, destroys them; and the damnation of hell is not to be dreaded by us, for the Lord is our salvation. This is a very different challenge from that of boastful Goliath, for it rests, not upon the conceited vigor of an arm of flesh, but upon the real power of the omnipotent I AM. “The Lord is the strength of my life.” Here is a third glowing epithet, to show that the writer’s hope was fastened with a threefold cord which could not be broken. We may well accumulate terms of praise where the Lord lavishes deeds of grace. Our life derives all its strength from God; and if he deigns to make us strong, we cannot be weakened by all the machinations of the adversary. “Of whom shall I be afraid?” The bold

question looks into the future as well as the present. "If God be for us," who can be against us, either now or in time to come?

Heavenly Father, please give us the confidence we need and seek in You. Please show us the way of life; shine Your light upon us and before us; guide us as we seek to faithfully follow You. We do seek to live in Your presence both now and forevermore. We see Your beauty all around us, and long to worship You in the beauty of holiness. Amen

Friday, March 11

Psalm 147

¹Praise the LORD! How good it is to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.

²The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel.

³He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds.

⁴He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names.

⁵Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.

⁶The LORD lifts up the downtrodden; he casts the wicked to the ground.

⁷Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre.

⁸He covers the heavens with clouds, prepares rain for the earth, makes grass grow on the hills.

⁹He gives to the animals their food, and to the young ravens when they cry.

¹⁰His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner;

¹¹but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

¹²Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion!

¹³For he strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your children within you.

¹⁴He grants peace within your borders; he fills you with the finest of wheat.

¹⁵He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly.

¹⁶He gives snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes.

¹⁷He hurls down hail like crumbs— who can stand before his cold?

¹⁸He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow.

¹⁹He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances to Israel.

²⁰He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his ordinances. Praise the LORD!

One day, Jesus surprised a tax collector named Levi by calling him to be His disciple. Tax collectors were despised as Roman collaborators and dishonest men, so why would Jesus call this man?

Levi left his tax booth behind and followed the Lord. He even threw a party for Jesus, and invited all his friends to celebrate. Of course, his friends were equally disreputable, and the Pharisees criticized Jesus for going into the house and eating with them. Christ's answer is classic: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:27-32).

Spiritually and physically, Jesus ministered healing. In this, He imitated His Father, shown as a Healer or Comforter in today's reading. Psalm 147 was probably written to commemorate the rebuilding of the Jerusalem walls after Israel's return from exile (vv. 2, 13-14).

It had broken the nation's heart to leave the Promised Land and to see the Temple burned. But God had not forgotten His people! With compassion, He had promised that He would one day bring Israel back and restore her (Isa. 51:3).

God's healing and comforting qualities are found in this psalm in context with many of His other attributes. He is the Creator, all-knowing, all-powerful, and just. He sustains, commands, reveals His Word, and takes pleasure in our faith and in our worship.

For today's metaphor, the key is verse 3: "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (cf. Ps. 34:18). God is like the Good Samaritan in that well-known parable, bandaging the victim and showing him kindness (Luke 10:30-37). He is a shepherd, caring for the needs of His flock (Ezek. 34:16). He's the "God of all comfort" who enables us to minister healing and comfort to others (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

Heavenly Father, You reign over all creation as a great and glorious God. You deserve praise and honor from all Your works. Today we sing our praises to You and honor Your word with our

attentive ears. Fill us with your Spirit that we might practice from our hearts all the truths we learn from Your word written. As we worship and serve You each day, we trust in your steadfast love manifested in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Saturday, March 12

Psalm 126

¹When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

²Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

³The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

⁴Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb.

⁵May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.

⁶Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

Some Christians are sadly prone to look on the dark side of everything, and to dwell more upon what they have gone through than upon what God has done for them. Ask for their impression of the Christian life, and they will describe their continual conflicts, their deep afflictions, their sad adversities, and the sinfulness of their hearts, yet with scarcely any allusion to the mercy and help which God has vouchsafed them. But a Christian whose soul is in a healthy state, will come forward joyously, and say, "I will speak, not about myself, but to the honor of my God. He hath brought me up out of an horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings: and he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God. The Lord hath done great things for me, whereof I am glad." Such an abstract of experience as this is the very best that any child of God can present. It is true that we endure trials, but it is just as true that we are delivered out of them. It is true that we have our corruptions, and mournfully do we know this, but it is quite as true that we have an all-sufficient Saviour, who overcomes these corruptions, and delivers us from their dominion. In looking back, it would be wrong to deny that we have been in the Slough of Despond, and have crept along the Valley of Humiliation, but it would be equally wicked to forget that we have been through them safely and profitably; we have not remained in them, thanks to our

Almighty Helper and Leader, who has brought us “out into a wealthy place.” The deeper our troubles, the louder our thanks to God, who has led us through all, and preserved us until now. Our griefs cannot mar the melody of our praise, we reckon them to be the bass part of our life’s song, “He hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad.”

Heavenly Father, many times we weep in sorrow and weep with those who weep. As we turn our thoughts to You and Your promises, turn our sorrow into joy. When we work hard to meet the needs of our families, others and ourselves, please give us good success and rejoicing in the fruit of our labors. We pray that you would build and guard our homes as we pray and trust in You. Fill us with your Spirit so we will walk in Your ways. Amen

Sunday, March 13

Psalm 84

¹How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!

²My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.

³Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O LORD of hosts, my King and my God.

⁴Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise. Selah

⁵Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

⁶As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools.

⁷They go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

⁸O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah

⁹Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed.

¹⁰For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness.

¹¹For the LORD God is a sun and shield; he bestows favor and honor. No good thing does the LORD withhold from those who walk uprightly.

¹²O LORD of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.

When was the last time you watched a sunrise? Perhaps you've slept in too often, and can't remember.

If you've been up, perhaps you've been busy or stuck in traffic, and not taken the time to enjoy this daily drama of nature. Perhaps because sunrise is so frequent, you've been taking it for granted. Yet no two sunrises are exactly the same—our Creator makes a new masterpiece each and every morning!

Today's verses use the sun as a metaphor for God. Notice there is no confusion between the sun and God, as in the case of the pagan nations which surrounded Israel. The sun is a created object, and only the Creator is worthy of worship.

In that case, what attributes of God do the Jewish writers want to highlight by comparing Him to the sun? One answer is His righteousness and glory (Mal. 4:2). For those who revere the Lord, a new day is coming. Like the sun rising, God will appear on the horizon of our wicked world, dispelling the darkness and bringing the fire of judgment to evildoers and granting healing and redemption to His worshipers (v. 1).

In exactly this way, the first coming of Christ was like a sunrise: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned" (Isa. 9:2; cf. Luke 1:76--79). When the day of the Lord is full, there will in fact be no more need for the sun—"the Lord will be [our] everlasting light" (Isa. 60:19-20).

A second meaning of this sun metaphor spotlights God's blessing or favor (Ps. 84:11). That's why the standard priestly blessing included the phrase, "the Lord make His face shine upon you" (Num. 6:25). As with the first meaning, this happy result is only for those who are living righteously, "those whose walk is blameless."

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Schedule a time soon to get up early and watch the sun rise. Pick a good vantage point. Allow plenty of time. You might even invite a friend to join you.

O God, we love to come into Your house and meet with You and Your people. We love to sing Your praises and honor Your Word. Amen

Monday, March 14

Psalm 22

¹My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

²O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.

³Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

⁴In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.

⁵To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

⁶But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people.

⁷All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;

⁸“Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver— let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”

⁹Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother’s breast.

¹⁰On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God.

¹¹Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

¹²Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me;

¹³they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.

¹⁴I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast;

¹⁵my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.

¹⁶For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me. My hands and feet have shriveled;

¹⁷I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me;

¹⁸they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.

¹⁹But you, O LORD, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid!

²⁰Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog!

²¹Save me from the mouth of the lion! From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.

²²I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:

²³You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

²⁴For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.

²⁵From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

²⁶The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD. May your hearts live forever!

²⁷All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.

²⁸For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.

²⁹To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him.

³⁰Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord,

³¹and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

Sometimes a poet captures an entire nation's heart. For many, Robert Frost expresses the American spirit. Others point to Walt Whitman as the quintessential American voice. For ancient Israel, King David gave voice to their praise, fears, and faith. In Psalm 22, David

consoled himself in the face of profound terror by recalling God's past faithfulness. Even when he felt utterly forsaken, he took refuge in God's character.

Centuries later, this lament became a prayer on the lips of our dying Savior. Although David didn't know that he was writing prophetically, Psalm 22 perfectly articulated Jesus' experience on the Cross. Utterly forsaken and mocked, Jesus cried out with the haunting question, "Why?" Yet as Pastor Brian Morgan says, "In his darkest hour, Jesus follows the practice of his whole life: He prays to His Father."

Matthew tells us that three hours after Jesus was placed on the cross, He cried this lament in Aramaic (v. 46). A cry that came from the very core of His soul! This was the cry of One completely cut off from God . . . cut off from all goodness, all mercy, all hope.

As we read this probing cry, we have to ask ourselves, "Why would God forsake Jesus? Why would the Father forsake His beloved Son?" We must ask ourselves this question, because it was for our sake that the Father did this. Second Corinthians 5:21 says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." The Father's abandonment of His Son must have been wrenching.

Those standing nearby mistakenly thought that Jesus was crying out to Elijah, since first-century Jews believed that Elijah would precede the Messiah's coming. But more than mistaken, these bystanders were unwilling to really hear Jesus' question. They taunted Jesus to see if Elijah really would come (v. 49).

Sometimes Christians think it isn't spiritual to lament. But David realized his need to cry out to God, and so did our Lord Jesus

Heavenly Father, You promised to be with us always, and we know that Your Holy Spirit indwells us. Yet, sometimes we feel that You are far from us, even as Your Son felt forsaken by You as He hung upon the cross. We learn from the Psalmist and Your faithfulness to Jesus the Messiah that You do not fail those who trust in You for salvation. No matter how He felt, Jesus maintained His loyalty to You and Your Word. He was not put to shame, for You raised Him from the dead and seated Him at Your right hand. Amen

Tuesday, March 15

Psalm 121

¹I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come?

²My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

³He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.

⁴He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

⁵The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand.

⁶The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

⁷The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.

⁸The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.

Author and seminar speaker Gary Rossberg tells of the time he was in a hotel lobby in Atlanta. Suddenly, there was a small commotion as a group of men moved quickly through the lobby. As the entourage passed Rossberg he saw that Nelson Mandela, the president of South Africa, was being escorted by a contingent of security people. Rossberg also noticed that as the group stepped onto the elevator, one of Mandela's guards turned around and entered backwards, guarding against trouble even at the last second before the elevator's doors closed. Rossberg says that act of vigilance defined for him what it means to be a protector.

That's a good picture of the way our God and Father surrounds us with His care. He watches us whether we are coming or going, and His protection is so complete that He is on watch for dangers coming at us from all sides.

This famous psalm is called a psalm of ascent, or a pilgrim psalm that worshipers recited as they headed up to Jerusalem to worship God at His temple. As a traveler, the psalmist may have seen the hills either as a source of comfort, or a source of danger because of potential robbers.

But either way, the pilgrim's confidence was in the Lord who made the hills and everything else to protect him along the journey. God would not allow the psalmist's foot to slip on the path, nor would He become indifferent to the traveler, indifference symbolized by sleeping.

In fact, the psalmist was assured that God would protect him from all dangers both during the day and at night. And in case there was any room left for concern, the psalm ends with two verses that declare the completeness of God's protection. He is the Protector over all of life, and His watchful care will last forever (vv. 7-8).

One tendency is to think that God protects us only in a 'spiritual' sense. Of course He protects us spiritually, but there's more to it than that. We're also on God's 'radar screen' wherever we go, and we probably won't know until heaven how many times He kept us from harm. The change of the calendar, or of the millennium, won't change His care. We can face anything with

His help.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Earlier generations of Christians used to sing on Sunday, 'Safely through another week, God has brought us on our way.'

That song probably had a lot more meaning to people who had to walk to church in hostile territory or ride a creaking wagon across the prairie. We may not see the same dangers around us that they saw, but God's protection is just as real. Why not gather family or friends, read Psalm 121 together, and offer a prayer of thanksgiving for God's protecting care?

Heavenly Father, we look up to You as we pray today, for You are high and lifted up in reality and in our praise of You. Your word teaches that You made heaven and earth, and You made us in Your image, a little lower than yourself. You know us completely, far better than we know ourselves. You know our needs. You anticipate every problem that will cause us to struggle in the days ahead. You keep Your eyes upon us day and night, ever ready to come to our rescue. Direct our paths, so we will not stray into evil. Protect us from Your enemies and ours, through Your Son. Amen

Wednesday, March 16

Psalm 34

¹I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

²My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad.

³O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.

⁴I sought the LORD, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.

⁵Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed.

⁶This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD, and was saved from every trouble.

⁷The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

⁸O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.

⁹O fear the LORD, you his holy ones, for those who fear him have no want.

¹⁰The young lions suffer want and hunger, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

¹¹Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

¹²Which of you desires life, and covets many days to enjoy good?

¹³Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.

¹⁴Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

¹⁵The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry.

¹⁶The face of the LORD is against evildoers, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

¹⁷When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears, and rescues them from all their troubles.

¹⁸The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.

¹⁹Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD rescues them from them all.

²⁰He keeps all their bones; not one of them will be broken.

²¹Evil brings death to the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

²²The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

In August, 1875, English bishop Edward Bickersteth was on vacation when he heard a minister speak on Isaiah 26:3. The speaker pointed out that in the original language of this verse, "peace" is repeated, the Hebrew way of conveying perfection. Bickersteth noted the insight-- and that same afternoon, he shared the comfort of this verse with a dying relative. God's peace seemed to flood the room, and Bickersteth was so moved that he took out a pen and paper and wrote the words that we know today as the hymn, "Peace, Perfect Peace."

Isaiah 26:3 is a wonderful promise, and Psalm 34 shows us one way to make God's peace real in our lives--through the expression of praise and thanksgiving in prayer.

The promised peace comes to the person whose mind is steadfast because it is fixed on the Lord. Verses 1-3 of our text reveal a mindset that is focused on the Lord, as David offers up to God his prayer of praise.

We can't talk about the power of prayer without realizing that one of the primary purposes of prayer is to "extol the Lord" (v. 1). And besides bringing God the glory that is due Him, this kind of prayer also serves as a testimony to others. David called on the congregation to join him in glorifying God.

David went on to explain the source of his confidence (vv. 4-7). God had delivered David from great danger and fear in the episode with the Philistine king Achish (1 Sam. 21:10-15). David went from fear to peace and radiant confidence because he sought God in prayer, and the Lord answered.

We're all "poor" in the sense David describes in verse 6. In ourselves we are bankrupt of the spiritual resources we need to experience God's peace and deliverance from trials.

But everything we lack, our great God has in abundance. When we praise Him even in the middle of trouble, we find the peace that comes only when "the angel of the Lord" takes up guard duty around us.

Paul knew that same peace. And he understood the vital connection between praise and thanksgiving, and the peace of God (see Phil. 4:6-7). When we come to God with joyful, thankful hearts, His peace "does sentry duty" in our lives.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Of course, God's peace does not mean the absence of problems. But it does provide the grace and power you need to persevere and praise Him despite any difficulty. According to Paul, peace comes with thanksgiving. Why not gather the family around this weekend, or get together with a few Christian friends and have a "praise and thanksgiving" party? Recall the good things God has done and is doing for you.

Lord God, we praise You daily for all You do. We praise You for teaching us about yourself and how we can trust You with our lives day by day. We praise You for Your great faithfulness. We pray that You will receive true joy from our praises, and from our efforts to express our love for You through our service of You and others. Lord, we confess our need of You, of Your healing touch, of Your strength, of Your guidance and wisdom. Please fill us with Your Holy Spirit that we might always be faithful to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Thursday, March 17

Psalm 31

¹In you, O LORD, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me.

²Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.

³You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake lead me and guide me,

⁴take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge.

⁵Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.

⁶You hate those who pay regard to worthless idols, but I trust in the LORD.

⁷I will exult and rejoice in your steadfast love, because you have seen my affliction; you have taken heed of my adversities,

⁸and have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy; you have set my feet in a broad place.

⁹Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also.

¹⁰For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away.

¹¹I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors, an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me.

¹²I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel.

¹³For I hear the whispering of many— terror all around!— as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.

¹⁴But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God."

¹⁵My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.

¹⁶Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

¹⁷Do not let me be put to shame, O LORD, for I call on you; let the wicked be put to shame; let them go dumbfounded to Sheol.

¹⁸Let the lying lips be stilled that speak insolently against the righteous with pride and contempt.

¹⁹O how abundant is your goodness that you have laid up for those who fear you, and accomplished for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of everyone!

²⁰In the shelter of your presence you hide them from human plots; you hold them safe under your shelter from contentious tongues.

²¹Blessed be the LORD, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was beset as a city under siege.

²²I had said in my alarm, "I am driven far from your sight." But you heard my supplications when I cried out to you for help.

²³Love the LORD, all you his saints. The LORD preserves the faithful, but abundantly repays the one who acts haughtily.

²⁴Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the LORD.

North Korea is the country that most intensely persecutes Christians, according to a World Watch List updated annually by the Open Doors organization. Other areas high on the list include Saudi Arabia, Laos, the central highlands of Vietnam, and Iran. In the isolated Communist nation of North Korea, tens of thousands of believers have been executed or imprisoned for being Christians—to practice one's faith openly is very dangerous. Yet reports indicate the church there continues to grow!

How can we pray about this persecution? The psalmist showed us a way in today's reading. Though we don't know the exact situation, David seemed to be faced with a murderous conspiracy (v. 13). In the face of trouble, he took refuge in the Lord and proclaimed his faith in God's strength, trustworthiness, loving care, and ability to rescue and guide him. He believed that God saw and understood the anguish of his soul and had already responded with grace (v. 8).

David's faith enabled him to rejoice, but his pain was real and he didn't pretend otherwise. He spoke of sorrow, grief, groaning, and affliction. Both body and soul were in agony—he compared himself to broken pottery. Socially, he was an object of contempt. His friends had deserted him. His joy was not a smiley-button pasted on over the pain—rather, it was deeper than the pain. That's why he was able to say, "You are my God, My times are in your hands." He trusted God's loving kindness to display itself at just the right time to save him (vv. 14–16).

Are you in a situation in which you or your family feel directly or indirectly persecuted for your faith? Or perhaps are you experiencing other sorts of troubles and difficulties? God sees and cares about your circumstances and feelings. Like the psalmist, cry out to Him. Describe the situation, affirm your trust in Him, and call on Him to rescue, vindicate, and give you hope. As Paul said: “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer” (Rom. 12:12; cf. 2 Cor. 4:7–12).

O God, we praise and thank You for the many mercies we have received from Your steadfast love. We continue to pray for all those in need, knowing that You will keep your many precious promises, revealed in Your word, to us. Amen.

Friday, March 18

Psalm 42

¹As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.

²My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?

³My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, “Where is your God?”

⁴These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.

⁵Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help

⁶and my God. My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.

⁷Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts; all your waves and your billows have gone over me.

⁸By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.

⁹I say to God, my rock, “Why have you forgotten me? Why must I walk about mournfully because the enemy oppresses me?”

¹⁰As with a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me continually, “Where is your God?”

¹¹Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

Canst thou answer this, believer? Canst thou find any reason why thou art so often mourning instead of rejoicing? Why yield to gloomy anticipations? Who told thee that the night would never end in day? Who told thee that the sea of circumstances would ebb out till there should be nothing left but long leagues of the mud of horrible poverty? Who told thee that the winter of thy discontent would proceed from frost to frost, from snow, and ice, and hail, to deeper snow, and yet more heavy tempest of despair? Knowest thou not that day follows night, that flood comes after ebb, that spring and summer succeed winter? Hope thou then! Hope thou ever! For God fails thee not. Dost thou not know that thy God loves thee in the midst of all this? Mountains, when in darkness hidden, are as real as in day, and God’s love is as true to thee now as it was in thy brightest moments. No father chastens always: thy Lord hates the rod as much as thou dost; he only cares to use it for that reason which should make thee willing to receive it, namely, that it works thy lasting good. Thou shalt yet climb Jacob’s ladder with the angels, and behold him who sits at the top of it—thy covenant God. Thou shalt yet, amidst the splendours of eternity, forget the trials of time, or only remember them to bless the God who led thee through them, and wrought thy lasting good by them. Come, sing in the midst of tribulation. Rejoice even while passing through the furnace. Make the wilderness to blossom like the rose! Cause the desert to ring with thine exulting joys, for these light afflictions will soon be over, and then “for ever with the Lord,” thy bliss shall never wane.

“Faint not nor fear, his arms are near,
He changeth not, and thou art dear;
Only believe and thou shalt see,
That Christ is all in all to thee.”

O God, You are the great Creator. You reign as the Lord over all. Some do not acknowledge You as their Creator. Some deny Your very existence. Others know that You created them, but they do not obey You as the Lord over their lives. Help me to look upon the world around me and remember You are the source of all life and light. When evil seems to be the winning side, and when it seems there is no chance for good to prevail, help me remember that You are Lord over all and more powerful than any circumstance. Forgive me when I have acted as though You did not exist, as though I had no responsibility to You as my Creator, Lord, and Savior. Fill my heart with love for You. Open my mind to see Your work in the world. Help me understand the Bible. Help me know how to apply Your word to the way I live each day. Amen

Saturday, March 19

Psalm 145

¹I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever.

²Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever.

³Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable.

⁴One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.

⁵On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.

⁶The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness.

⁷They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness, and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

⁸The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

⁹The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

¹⁰All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your faithful shall bless you.

¹¹They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power,

¹²to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

¹³Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.

¹⁴The LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.

¹⁵The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.

¹⁶You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.

¹⁷The LORD is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings.

¹⁸The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

¹⁹He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry, and saves them.

²⁰The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.

²¹My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.

An amusing story is told of a three-year-old, kneeling beside her bed, who was overhead praying, "Our Father, Who does art in heaven, Harold is His name. Amen." She had sat in the church pew Sunday after Sunday, reciting words of pure nonsense! Her childish ignorance may not be completely unlike our own misunderstandings of the Lord's Prayer. Take as an example the text of today's key verse. If we pray for the dawning of God's kingdom, do we know enough to partner with God in this great endeavor and then recognize its arrival?

A study of the book of Esther helps us to understand essential principles about the kingdom of God. Today's reading of Psalm 145 provides the perfect framework for what we can anticipate learning from Esther. Psalm 145 exalts the praiseworthy qualities of God that make Him the King over all. First, His "kingdom is an everlasting kingdom" (v. 13). In Esther's story, we discover God's great power displayed centuries before Christ was ever born. Our King ruled then, and He still rules today!

Not only is this King eternally powerful, He is also loving. The story of Esther allows us to see God's action to deliver His people, the Jews, from genocide. "[He] is near to all who call on him . . . He hears their cry and saves them" (vv. 18-19). When God's people suffer and then pray for His mercy, He shows Himself faithful to save them. He is the King of compassion.

Finally, the book of Esther reveals that our God and King is righteous. "The Lord watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy" (v. 20). He rules justly, delivering the innocent and punishing the wicked.

In the presence of such a King, the response is celebration. In Esther's time, in the time of the psalmist, and even today, we have great cause to praise Him (vv. 1-2), to testify of His greatness (vv. 4-7), to trust His goodness and compassion (vv. 8-9), to be comforted by His presence and care (vv. 14-16), and to hope in His righteousness (v. 20).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Make a list of the attributes of God that are praised in Psalm 145: His power, love, goodness, compassion, and righteousness. Under each heading, write specific ways you've recently seen this aspect of God's character displayed in your own life or in your church. As you recall the

times when God has revealed Himself, praise Him! And if you're having trouble seeing God at work in your life, ask for the faith to believe that He is powerful, loving, and good.

Heavenly Father, Your glory and splendor is above our comprehension and ability to praise and honor rightly. Fill us with Your gracious presence. Give us a true sense of Your loving kindness. With all our hearts, we seek to express our loyalty and thanksgiving to You. By Your indwelling Holy Spirit, enable us to worship You sincerely. Amen

Sunday, March 20

Psalm 32

¹Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

²Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

³While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.

⁴For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah

⁵Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah

⁶Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.

⁷You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. Selah

⁸I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

⁹Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.

¹⁰Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD.

¹¹Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

Viking explorer Eric the Red discovered a new North Atlantic island in the tenth century. It was covered mostly with glaciers and rocks, having only a few patches of land that were suitable for living. Yet Eric gave his discovery the name Greenland, in the hope that colonists would be more likely to come to the new island if it had an attractive name.

Whether Eric's ruse worked is a question for the historians. But it illustrates our human tendency to put a positive spin on reality. Psalm 32 may have been written against the background of another ruse. We do not have the exact details in the text, but David apparently sinned in some way and tried to cover it up (vv. 3-5)(Some believe it was David's sin with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11).

The king tried to deny the truth for a period of time, but it only made him miserable. He complained that his strength 'was sapped as in the heat of summer' (v. 4).

Some of our Today readers may identify with this analogy more quickly than others, but all of us have experienced summer heat that left us feeling drained and exhausted. Of all the seasons, summer has the unique ability to steal our energy. David chose his word picture well, because our Christian lives can also enter a period in which our faith feels parched and weak.

In David's case, sin was the cause of a summer drought in his heart, and even his body. The remedy for David's dryness was full confession of his sin to God and a prayer for forgiveness. If that is the cause of our problem, the remedy is the same. Instead of being blasted by the summer heat of guilt, the believer whose 'sin account' is current with God is blessed.

There are other reasons for a period of time like this, of course. Physical or emotional suffering, intense spiritual struggle, or any number of other circumstances can bear down on us and drain away our strength. But whether our need is to confess, or persevere in the face of a hard trial, God has new strength waiting for us when we turn to Him.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We again encourage you to use Scripture verses in prayer. Today's lesson calls for this kind of response.

The Scripture we suggest is another passage that will probably be very familiar to you, Isaiah 40:28-31. Why not go to these powerful verses and turn the prophet's statements into a prayer for spiritual strength? Since yesterday's application emphasized thanksgiving, you may want to continue that theme by thanking God that He never grows weary, and that He promises strength to those who are tired. Even if your faith is not in a summer drought right now, you'll find these truths invigorating

Heavenly Father, we join with those who love You, who have confessed their sins to You, who have repented of their sins, who have received Your forgiveness, and who rejoice in Your cleansing from all sin. We praise You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who made all these things possible for us. He showed and taught us how to live as Your children, and by His grace we received salvation and eternal life through His death. We thank You for raising Him from the dead. Help us to praise and serve You always in the power of His Spirit. Amen

Monday, March 21

Psalm 25

¹To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

²O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.

³Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

⁴Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths.

⁵Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

⁶Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

⁷Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O LORD!

⁸Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

⁹He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

¹⁰All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

¹¹For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great.

¹²Who are they that fear the LORD? He will teach them the way that they should choose.

¹³They will abide in prosperity, and their children shall possess the land.

¹⁴The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes his covenant known to them.

¹⁵My eyes are ever toward the LORD, for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

¹⁶Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.

¹⁷Relieve the troubles of my heart, and bring me out of my distress.

¹⁸Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins.

¹⁹Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me.

²⁰O guard my life, and deliver me; do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.

²¹May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you.

²²Redeem Israel, O God, out of all its troubles.

Are you too busy to pray? Well, then, hire someone to do it for you! Believe it or not, prayers-for-hire is a growing business in the Philippines. If people want something—for example, to pass a bar or medical exam—they pay a “prayer lady” to ask God for it while they continue working or studying.

No doubt God is appalled when He hears these prayers-for-pay. One reason is because at the heart of true prayer is a personal relationship between God and His people. We’ve mentioned the relational aspect of prayer several times already this month, and we’ll give it special attention in today’s psalm.

David opened his prayer with a simple but profound statement about the relationship between himself (as the king) and God (as the King). God is the righteous protector of His people who would bring their enemies to shame. He is worthy of the wholehearted trust David placed in Him.

A series of petitions and praises made in the context of this relationship follow, many of which focus on David’s desire to know God better. He prayed that God would teach and guide him in the way of truth and obedience, the only way that he could have any genuine hope. He also prayed that God would “remember” him—meaning, as we’ve seen before, that God would remain loving and faithful to him. Only God’s mercy and love could cover and cleanse his sins. The psalmist was confident that God is the sort of God who can and will answer such requests. He affirmed that God instructs sinners and forgives wrongdoing. He loves people who are

humble, repentant, and obedient, and who revere Him. Best of all, “The Lord confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.” In this relationship, God Himself has taken the initiative and shared His “secrets,” as friends do (v. 14; cf. John 15:14).

As we see in Psalm 25 and elsewhere, the idea of a personal relationship with God is a key facet of the life of prayer.

O God, we trust totally in You as we trust in no other. You are the creator of all things, and our life depends on You moment by moment. You give us breath and we respond with songs of praise and hymns of adoration. You give us truth, and we teach others Your word and try to model Your ways. You give us eternal life, and we share the gospel of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, with all who will listen. You fill us with Your Holy Spirit, and we love others as You have loved us. You call us Your friends, and we seek to be friends with the friendless. In all things we completely depend upon You and do not rest secure in our own strength or wisdom. Draw us closer to You and enable us to live more faithfully as followers of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Tuesday, March 22

Psalm 51

¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

³For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

⁴Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.

⁵Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.

⁶You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

⁹Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

¹¹Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.

¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

¹⁴Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

¹⁵O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

¹⁶For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.

¹⁷The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

¹⁸Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,

¹⁹then you will delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

In *Reliving the Passion*, author Walter Wangerin questioned whether the reasons for a particular sin matter.

Does the motive of a sin--its rationale, its reasons--make it any less a sin? Isn't the betrayal of the sovereignty of the Lord in our lives always a sin, regardless of the factors that drove us to betray Him? Yes! Yet we habitually defend ourselves and diminish our fault by referring to reasons why we "had to" do it. We sinners are so backward that we try to justify ourselves by some condition which preceded the sin.

To rationalize sin is to justify oneself, protecting and holding onto sin. But to see sin as God does is to repent in brokenness of heart, allowing His forgiveness to cleanse us.

The background for today's reading is King David's adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband, Uriah (see 2 Sam. 11–12). His eventual confession prompted by a confrontation with the prophet Nathan is recorded here.

Where did David begin in his confession? He began with God. His confession showed great faith in God's character: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions" (v. 1). He trusted in God's power to forgive sin--to blot it out and wash the sinner clean. Hyssop symbolized ritual cleansing under the Law (v. 7). The king's confession also demonstrated spiritual brokenness. He understood how much he offended God; in fact, he couldn't forget it. He grieved deeply over what he'd done--it was as though his bones had been crushed. He acknowledged the justice of God's punishment, which is no light statement considering that the penalty of his sin was the death of his baby son (v. 4). He also acknowledged his general sinful condition (v. 5).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Which verse in Psalm 51 impressed you the most? Why? Which of David's attitudes did you find most convicting? Why? How can you apply these biblical truths to your life today?

Lord Jesus, the psalms of David express our needs. Forgive us and cleanse us from our sins. Help us live and teach the truth that others might find salvation in You. Amen

Wednesday, March 23

Psalm 102

¹Hear my prayer, O LORD; let my cry come to you.

²Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress. Incline your ear to me; answer me speedily in the day when I call.

³For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace.

⁴My heart is stricken and withered like grass; I am too wasted to eat my bread.

⁵Because of my loud groaning my bones cling to my skin.

⁶I am like an owl of the wilderness, like a little owl of the waste places.

⁷I lie awake; I am like a lonely bird on the housetop.

⁸All day long my enemies taunt me; those who deride me use my name for a curse.

⁹For I eat ashes like bread, and mingle tears with my drink,

¹⁰because of your indignation and anger; for you have lifted me up and thrown me aside.

¹¹My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass.

¹²But you, O LORD, are enthroned forever; your name endures to all generations.

¹³You will rise up and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to favor it; the appointed time has come.

¹⁴For your servants hold its stones dear, and have pity on its dust.

¹⁵The nations will fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth your glory.

¹⁶For the LORD will build up Zion; he will appear in his glory.

¹⁷He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and will not despise their prayer.

¹⁸Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet unborn may praise the LORD:

¹⁹that he looked down from his holy height, from heaven the LORD looked at the earth,

²⁰to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die;

²¹so that the name of the LORD may be declared in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem,

²²when peoples gather together, and kingdoms, to worship the LORD.

²³He has broken my strength in midcourse; he has shortened my days.

²⁴“O my God,” I say, “do not take me away at the mid-point of my life, you whose years endure throughout all generations.”

²⁵Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.

²⁶They will perish, but you endure; they will all wear out like a garment. You change them like clothing, and they pass away;

²⁷but you are the same, and your years have no end.

²⁸The children of your servants shall live secure; their offspring shall be established in your presence.

Patrick, the fifth-century missionary who is credited with bringing the gospel to Ireland, once came under severe attack from critics of his ministry. Patrick wrote in his *Confession* that he drew strength from God during the attacks. 'Indeed He bore me up, though I was trampled underfoot in such a way. For although I was put down and shamed, not too much harm came to me.'

If you've ever felt trampled on by life, maybe you can identify with Patrick's feelings. The writer of today's psalm was even more eloquent. He cried out for God to answer him in his deep distress, pleading with the Lord not to turn His face or ear away from the psalmist's prayer.

We're not told what led to this wintry period of turmoil in the psalmist's life. But the symptoms sound familiar. He felt the effects in his body (v. 3). He couldn't eat or sleep (vv. 4, 7). And he felt completely isolated, like a bird sitting among ruins (v. 6).

But in this case there was more. For whatever reason, the writer says God had allowed his deep distress to come on him. This introduces an element of the hard times that we need to face. There is no definite indication in the psalm that this believer's sin was the reason God had 'taken [him] up and thrown [him] aside' (v. 10).

But this figure of speech is too graphic simply to throw aside the idea that God permits hard circumstances to crash against His people. The psalmist was being harassed by his enemies, but clearly God was sovereign over his problems.

As we read on, though, we begin to discover why the Psalms have been called 'the medicine chest of the soul.' Today's reading ends with the confident statement of verse 12, but the following verses address the day when God will establish His kingdom and all the people of the earth will worship Him (v. 22). In other words, the psalm brings us back to the reassuring theme that no matter what season of life or faith we may be in, God is constant in His righteous person and purpose.

This might be a good opportunity to spend some extra time praying for a request or need that is especially important to you right now. Today's verse reminds us that God's ear is always open to the heartfelt prayers of His children. Why not take a walk sometime today and pray as you go? You can begin by praying from God's Word, reminding yourself of the promise in verse 17 and thanking Him for the open access you have to heaven.

Lord Jesus, in these days of uncertainty and trouble, we ask You for guidance, strength, and wisdom. We look forward to Your coming again to make all things right, according to Your precious promises. Come now, Lord Jesus. Fill us with Your Spirit. Give us insight to prepare for the future. Amen

Thursday, March 24

Psalm 130

¹Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

²Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

³If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

⁴But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

⁵I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;

⁶my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.

⁸It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Jesus, Love of all loving, your compassion is without limit. We are thirsting for you, the one who tells us: "Why be afraid? Have no fear; I am here."—Taizé, *Prayer for Each Day*

Several years ago a popular book addressed a difficult topic: why bad things happen to good people. This haunting question can thwart prayer because we can't understand why God lets people, including ourselves, suffer. This question of suffering is profound and can only be briefly touched upon in today's lesson.

We can start by acknowledging that we live in a fallen world filled with evil and sin. Because we live in the world, we are impacted by evil, even when there's no direct connection between this evil and sin in our own lives. Yet evil in the world is a constant reminder of the overwhelming need for the cross.

And the cross is where we acknowledge the redemptive hand of God, which brings forth His good purposes from circumstances intended for evil. God doesn't make evil good, but He can redeem evil for His good.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

How then do we pray in the face of suffering? First, we humbly confess that we may never know why certain events happen.

Then, we begin focusing on God's goodness and mercy. This is not to glibly praise God for the evil at hand or to deny our pain, but to look beyond the difficulty to our loving Heavenly Father. Today's reading from Matthew teaches about our Father's goodness.

Instead of focusing on why, consider asking what?—"what might God be doing here?"—or where?—"where is God in the midst of this?" Ultimately this last question will lead us to the cross and our gracious Savior who was willing to pay the price for all sin.

Finally, we need to feel freedom to come before the Lord honestly in our pain. Sometimes tears are the only prayer we can offer up, and our Lord understands those times of hurt and pain. He will hear our prayer of tears. Look at the following prayer or the reading from Psalm 130 as the basis of your own prayer before God.

Heavenly Father, from the very depth of our being, we pray to You. Sometimes we pray with shame and sorrow for our sins, knowing that You have forgiven us, but still feeling deep remorse for having failed You. At other times we pray joyfully, with words and feelings of praise welling up from the bottom of our hearts. We want to express our love for You, knowing that our thoughts will always inadequately express the reverence Your holiness deserves. By Your Spirit help us to pray in ways that honor You through Jesus Christ. Amen

Friday, March 25

Psalm 149

¹Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the faithful.

²Let Israel be glad in its Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.

³Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.

⁴For the LORD takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with victory.

⁵Let the faithful exult in glory; let them sing for joy on their couches.

⁶Let the high praises of God be in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands,

⁷to execute vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples,

⁸to bind their kings with fetters and their nobles with chains of iron,

⁹to execute on them the judgment decreed. This is glory for all his faithful ones. Praise the LORD!

Be glad of heart, O believer, but take care that thy gladness has its spring in the Lord. Thou hast much cause for gladness in thy God, for thou canst sing with David, “God, my exceeding joy.” Be glad that the Lord reigneth, that Jehovah is King! Rejoice that he sits upon the throne, and ruleth all things! Every attribute of God should become a fresh ray in the sunlight of our gladness. That he is wise should make us glad, knowing as we do our own foolishness. That he is mighty, should cause us to rejoice who tremble at our weakness. That he is everlasting, should always be a theme of joy when we know that we wither as the grass. That he is unchanging, should perpetually yield us a song, since we change every hour. That he is full of grace, that he is overflowing with it, and that this grace in covenant he has given to us; that it is ours to cleanse us, ours to keep us, ours to sanctify us, ours to perfect us, ours to bring us to glory—all this should tend to make us glad in him. This gladness in God is as a deep river; we have only as yet touched its brink, we know a little of its clear sweet, heavenly streams, but onward the depth is greater, and the current more impetuous in its joy. The Christian feels that he may delight himself not only in what God is, but also in all that God has done in the past. The Psalms show us that God’s people in olden times were wont to think much of God’s actions, and to have a song concerning each of them. So let God’s people now rehearse the deeds of the Lord! Let them tell of his mighty acts, and “sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously.” Nor let them ever cease to sing, for as new mercies flow to them day by day, so should their gladness in the Lord’s loving acts in providence and in grace show itself in continued thanksgiving. Be glad ye children of Zion and rejoice in the Lord your God

Lord God, cleanse our hearts, renew our minds, fill us with Your Holy Spirit as we worship You in spirit and in truth. Reveal unto us the deeper truths in Your word that will transform our lives and enable us to bless others with the knowledge of You. Help us to reason together with You and understand how You demonstrate Your love, justice, mercy, forgiveness, and grace to us in Jesus Christ. If we fall into sin or find ourselves in danger of being misled, direct our steps and draw us closer to You that we might live wholly for You. Teach us to trust more in You and Your promises as we pray in the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Saturday, March 26

Psalm 119

¹Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD.

²Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart,
³who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways.
⁴You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.
⁵O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!
⁶Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.
⁷I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous ordinances.
⁸I will observe your statutes; do not utterly forsake me.
⁹How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word.
¹⁰With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments.
¹¹I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you.
¹²Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes.
¹³With my lips I declare all the ordinances of your mouth.
¹⁴I delight in the way of your decrees as much as in all riches.
¹⁵I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways.
¹⁶I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.
¹⁷Deal bountifully with your servant, so that I may live and observe your word.
¹⁸Open my eyes, so that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.
¹⁹I live as an alien in the land; do not hide your commandments from me.
²⁰My soul is consumed with longing for your ordinances at all times.
²¹You rebuke the insolent, accursed ones, who wander from your commandments;
²²take away from me their scorn and contempt, for I have kept your decrees.

²³Even though princes sit plotting against me, your servant will meditate on your statutes.

²⁴Your decrees are my delight, they are my counselors.

²⁵My soul clings to the dust; revive me according to your word.

²⁶When I told of my ways, you answered me; teach me your statutes.

²⁷Make me understand the way of your precepts, and I will meditate on your wondrous works.

²⁸My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word.

²⁹Put false ways far from me; and graciously teach me your law.

³⁰I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I set your ordinances before me.

³¹I cling to your decrees, O LORD; let me not be put to shame.

³²I run the way of your commandments, for you enlarge my understanding.

³³Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it to the end.

³⁴Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.

³⁵Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.

³⁶Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain.

³⁷Turn my eyes from looking at vanities; give me life in your ways.

³⁸Confirm to your servant your promise, which is for those who fear you.

³⁹Turn away the disgrace that I dread, for your ordinances are good.

⁴⁰See, I have longed for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life.

⁴¹Let your steadfast love come to me, O LORD, your salvation according to your promise.

⁴²Then I shall have an answer for those who taunt me, for I trust in your word.

⁴³Do not take the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for my hope is in your ordinances.

⁴⁴I will keep your law continually, forever and ever.

⁴⁵I shall walk at liberty, for I have sought your precepts.

⁴⁶I will also speak of your decrees before kings, and shall not be put to shame;

⁴⁷I find my delight in your commandments, because I love them.

⁴⁸I revere your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes.

⁴⁹Remember your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope.

⁵⁰This is my comfort in my distress, that your promise gives me life.

⁵¹The arrogant utterly deride me, but I do not turn away from your law.

⁵²When I think of your ordinances from of old, I take comfort, O LORD.

⁵³Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked, those who forsake your law.

⁵⁴Your statutes have been my songs wherever I make my home.

⁵⁵I remember your name in the night, O LORD, and keep your law.

⁵⁶This blessing has fallen to me, for I have kept your precepts.

⁵⁷The LORD is my portion; I promise to keep your words.

⁵⁸I implore your favor with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise.

⁵⁹When I think of your ways, I turn my feet to your decrees;

⁶⁰I hurry and do not delay to keep your commandments.

⁶¹Though the cords of the wicked ensnare me, I do not forget your law.

⁶²At midnight I rise to praise you, because of your righteous ordinances.

⁶³I am a companion of all who fear you, of those who keep your precepts.

⁶⁴The earth, O LORD, is full of your steadfast love; teach me your statutes.

- ⁶⁵You have dealt well with your servant, O LORD, according to your word.
- ⁶⁶Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments.
- ⁶⁷Before I was humbled I went astray, but now I keep your word.
- ⁶⁸You are good and do good; teach me your statutes.
- ⁶⁹The arrogant smear me with lies, but with my whole heart I keep your precepts.
- ⁷⁰Their hearts are fat and gross, but I delight in your law.
- ⁷¹It is good for me that I was humbled, so that I might learn your statutes.
- ⁷²The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.
- ⁷³Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments.
- ⁷⁴Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word.
- ⁷⁵I know, O LORD, that your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness you have humbled me.
- ⁷⁶Let your steadfast love become my comfort according to your promise to your servant.
- ⁷⁷Let your mercy come to me, that I may live; for your law is my delight.
- ⁷⁸Let the arrogant be put to shame, because they have subverted me with guile; as for me, I will meditate on your precepts.
- ⁷⁹Let those who fear you turn to me, so that they may know your decrees.
- ⁸⁰May my heart be blameless in your statutes, so that I may not be put to shame.
- ⁸¹My soul languishes for your salvation; I hope in your word.
- ⁸²My eyes fail with watching for your promise; I ask, "When will you comfort me?"
- ⁸³For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke, yet I have not forgotten your statutes.
- ⁸⁴How long must your servant endure? When will you judge those who persecute me?

⁸⁵The arrogant have dug pitfalls for me; they flout your law.

⁸⁶All your commandments are enduring; I am persecuted without cause; help me!

⁸⁷They have almost made an end of me on earth; but I have not forsaken your precepts.

⁸⁸In your steadfast love spare my life, so that I may keep the decrees of your mouth.

⁸⁹The LORD exists forever; your word is firmly fixed in heaven.

⁹⁰Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast.

⁹¹By your appointment they stand today, for all things are your servants.

⁹²If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my misery.

⁹³I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life.

⁹⁴I am yours; save me, for I have sought your precepts.

⁹⁵The wicked lie in wait to destroy me, but I consider your decrees.

⁹⁶I have seen a limit to all perfection, but your commandment is exceedingly broad.

⁹⁷Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all day long.

⁹⁸Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is always with me.

⁹⁹I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your decrees are my meditation.

¹⁰⁰I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts.

¹⁰¹I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word.

¹⁰²I do not turn away from your ordinances, for you have taught me.

¹⁰³How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

¹⁰⁴Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.

¹⁰⁵Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

¹⁰⁶I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to observe your righteous ordinances.

¹⁰⁷I am severely afflicted; give me life, O LORD, according to your word.

¹⁰⁸Accept my offerings of praise, O LORD, and teach me your ordinances.

¹⁰⁹I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law.

¹¹⁰The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts.

¹¹¹Your decrees are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.

¹¹²I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end.

¹¹³I hate the double-minded, but I love your law.

¹¹⁴You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in your word.

¹¹⁵Go away from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commandments of my God.

¹¹⁶Uphold me according to your promise, that I may live, and let me not be put to shame in my hope.

¹¹⁷Hold me up, that I may be safe and have regard for your statutes continually.

¹¹⁸You spurn all who go astray from your statutes; for their cunning is in vain.

¹¹⁹All the wicked of the earth you count as dross; therefore I love your decrees.

¹²⁰My flesh trembles for fear of you, and I am afraid of your judgments.

¹²¹I have done what is just and right; do not leave me to my oppressors.

¹²²Guarantee your servant's well-being; do not let the godless oppress me.

¹²³My eyes fail from watching for your salvation, and for the fulfillment of your righteous promise.

¹²⁴Deal with your servant according to your steadfast love, and teach me your statutes.

- ¹²⁵ I am your servant; give me understanding, so that I may know your decrees.
- ¹²⁶ It is time for the LORD to act, for your law has been broken.
- ¹²⁷ Truly I love your commandments more than gold, more than fine gold.
- ¹²⁸ Truly I direct my steps by all your precepts; I hate every false way.
- ¹²⁹ Your decrees are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them.
- ¹³⁰ The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.
- ¹³¹ With open mouth I pant, because I long for your commandments.
- ¹³² Turn to me and be gracious to me, as is your custom toward those who love your name.
- ¹³³ Keep my steps steady according to your promise, and never let iniquity have dominion over me.
- ¹³⁴ Redeem me from human oppression, that I may keep your precepts.
- ¹³⁵ Make your face shine upon your servant, and teach me your statutes.
- ¹³⁶ My eyes shed streams of tears because your law is not kept.
- ¹³⁷ You are righteous, O LORD, and your judgments are right.
- ¹³⁸ You have appointed your decrees in righteousness and in all faithfulness.
- ¹³⁹ My zeal consumes me because my foes forget your words.
- ¹⁴⁰ Your promise is well tried, and your servant loves it.
- ¹⁴¹ I am small and despised, yet I do not forget your precepts.
- ¹⁴² Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and your law is the truth.
- ¹⁴³ Trouble and anguish have come upon me, but your commandments are my delight.
- ¹⁴⁴ Your decrees are righteous forever; give me understanding that I may live.

¹⁴⁵With my whole heart I cry; answer me, O LORD. I will keep your statutes.

¹⁴⁶I cry to you; save me, that I may observe your decrees.

¹⁴⁷I rise before dawn and cry for help; I put my hope in your words.

¹⁴⁸My eyes are awake before each watch of the night, that I may meditate on your promise.

¹⁴⁹In your steadfast love hear my voice; O LORD, in your justice preserve my life.

¹⁵⁰Those who persecute me with evil purpose draw near; they are far from your law.

¹⁵¹Yet you are near, O LORD, and all your commandments are true.

¹⁵²Long ago I learned from your decrees that you have established them forever.

¹⁵³Look on my misery and rescue me, for I do not forget your law.

¹⁵⁴Plead my cause and redeem me; give me life according to your promise.

¹⁵⁵Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek your statutes.

¹⁵⁶Great is your mercy, O LORD; give me life according to your justice.

¹⁵⁷Many are my persecutors and my adversaries, yet I do not swerve from your decrees.

¹⁵⁸I look at the faithless with disgust, because they do not keep your commands.

¹⁵⁹Consider how I love your precepts; preserve my life according to your steadfast love.

¹⁶⁰The sum of your word is truth; and every one of your righteous ordinances endures forever.

¹⁶¹Princes persecute me without cause, but my heart stands in awe of your words.

¹⁶²I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil.

¹⁶³I hate and abhor falsehood, but I love your law.

¹⁶⁴Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous ordinances.

¹⁶⁵Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble.

¹⁶⁶I hope for your salvation, O LORD, and I fulfill your commandments.

¹⁶⁷My soul keeps your decrees; I love them exceedingly.

¹⁶⁸I keep your precepts and decrees, for all my ways are before you.

¹⁶⁹Let my cry come before you, O LORD; give me understanding according to your word.

¹⁷⁰Let my supplication come before you; deliver me according to your promise.

¹⁷¹My lips will pour forth praise, because you teach me your statutes.

¹⁷²My tongue will sing of your promise, for all your commandments are right.

¹⁷³Let your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts.

¹⁷⁴I long for your salvation, O LORD, and your law is my delight.

¹⁷⁵Let me live that I may praise you, and let your ordinances help me.

¹⁷⁶I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek out your servant, for I do not forget your commandments.

Lord, you have promised to meet those who seek your face. Come now and reveal your presence to me as I make myself present to you. . . . Amen. – *A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants*

Sometimes Christians feel uncomfortable with meditation, perhaps due to New Age forms of meditation. But meditation simply means to reflect deeply on something. The Bible is filled with exhortations to meditate on God's Word and works, and the history of the church records numerous examples of men and women who heeded this call to contemplate God's Word. There is much we can learn from this approach to prayer that includes sustained reflection on our Lord and His Word.

For one thing, meditation is not a mindless repetition of certain phrases, but an intense concentration on God and His ways. Scriptural exhortations to meditate are always directed toward God's deeds, laws, or promises. For another thing, true meditation is not a flight from the world. Thomas Merton wrote, "Meditation has no point unless it is firmly rooted in life."

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The psalmist exclaimed, "I meditate on [your law] all day long" (Ps. 119:97). Let's consider several approaches to meditation.

Sometime today if possible, set aside fifteen to twenty minutes for solitude and meditation. Choose a short section of Scripture, perhaps from today's Psalm, and read it slowly several times. If distractions come up, ask the Lord for focus as you reread your chosen passage. As you silently dwell on the passage, ask the Lord to speak to you from this passage. Try to keep focused on His Word and His presence. At the end of your time of meditation, consider writing down things the Lord may have revealed to you.

Another way to meditate on Scripture is to use your imagination to consider the feelings and thoughts of people in the passage. For example, as you read today's passage from Joshua, imagine how it would feel to face a formidable opponent following the death of an incredible leader like Moses. How might the Lord's promises have particularly encouraged Joshua? Why was it important for Joshua to meditate on the Book of the Law? What did the promised land look like?

Heavenly Father, You have given us Your law that we might walk according to Your precepts and standards. You have called us to love You with our whole heart, and love our neighbors as ourselves. Indeed, we know this is the pathway to happiness and the way to enjoy eternal life now and forevermore. Thank You for sending Jesus Christ into our world to show us the depth of Your commitment to us. Help us to be likewise committed to You, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen

Sunday, March 27

Psalm 146

¹Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!

²I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

³Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.

⁴When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.

⁵Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God,

⁶who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever;

⁷who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free;

⁸the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous.

⁹The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

¹⁰The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD!

Thomas Carlyle once said, “Foolish men imagine that because judgment for an evil thing is delayed, there is no justice, but only accident here below. Judgment for an evil thing is many times delayed some day or two, some century or two, but it is sure as life and death!” In short, God is a God who keeps His promises.

The author of today’s psalm would agree with this statement. Psalm 146 is a song of praise that appears to be prompted by the failings of mortal men (vv. 3–4). In contrast, God is both willing and able to restore righteousness. The psalmist praises God for who He is, based on what He does: He upholds the cause of the oppressed, He gives food to the hungry, sets prisoners free, gives sight to the blind, lifts up those who are bowed down, watches over the alien, and sustains the fatherless and the widows (vv. 7–9). While mortal men have a moral responsibility laid on them by God, justice ultimately comes from God.

The psalmist drew attention to the three categories of people that were most likely to be mistreated in Israel: the resident alien who had no civil rights and the widow and orphan who could be easily taken advantage of. But as one commentator said, “God is their champion. And if He can and does meet such needs as these, no kind of need is beyond His help--He is king, powerful and unlike human leaders.”

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Psalm 105:2 commands the nation of Israel to “Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts.” Today, sharpen your pencils and warm up the singing voice and spend some time writing your own hymn of praise to the God of the universe. Start with the tune of “Amazing Grace” or a favorite chorus or hymn and make up your own lyrics thanking God for His justice, faithfulness, and provision in your life. When you’ve finished with the words, sing your new song to the Lord.

Heavenly Father, today we gather to praise Your name together, as Your people. With one heart and mind in undivided loyalty to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, we seek to serve You. O Lord, we trust in You and rejoice that You hold our lives in Your hands. Help us to be faithful and righteous in all of our dealings with You and others as we trust and pray in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Monday, March 28

Psalm 91

¹You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,

²will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."

³For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence;

⁴he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

⁵You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day,

⁶or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday.

⁷A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.

⁸You will only look with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.

⁹Because you have made the LORD your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place,

¹⁰no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.

¹¹For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

¹²On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.

¹³You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.

¹⁴Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name.

¹⁵When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them.

¹⁶With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.

God delivers his people from the snare of the fowler in two senses. From, and out of. First, he delivers them from the snare—does not let them enter it; and secondly, if they should be caught therein, he delivers them out of it. The first promise is the most precious to some; the second is the best to others.

“He shall deliver thee from the snare.” How? Trouble is often the means whereby God delivers us. God knows that our backsliding will soon end in our destruction, and he in mercy sends the rod. We say, “Lord, why is this?” not knowing that our trouble has been the means of delivering us from far greater evil. Many have been thus saved from ruin by their sorrows and their crosses; these have frightened the birds from the net. At other times, God keeps his people from the snare of the fowler by giving them great spiritual strength, so that when they are tempted to do evil they say, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” But what a blessed thing it is that if the believer shall, in an evil hour, come into the net, yet God will bring him out of it! O backslider, be cast down, but do not despair. Wanderer though thou hast been, hear what thy Redeemer saith—“Return, O backsliding children; I will have mercy upon you.” But you say you cannot return, for you are a captive. Then listen to the promise—“Surely he shall deliver thee out of the snare of the fowler.” Thou shalt yet be brought out of all evil into which thou hast fallen, and though thou shalt never cease to repent of thy ways, yet he that hath loved thee will not cast thee away; he will receive thee, and give thee joy and gladness, that the bones which he has broken may rejoice. No bird of paradise shall die in the fowler’s net.

Heavenly Father, we trust in You and in Your word. We pray that we will always honor You by the way we live and the words we speak in the power of Your Spirit. Amen

Tuesday, March 29

Psalm 148

¹Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights!

²Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host!

³Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars!

⁴Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!

⁵Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created.

⁶He established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

⁷Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps,

⁸fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command!

⁹Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!

¹⁰Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!

¹¹Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth!

¹²Young men and women alike, old and young together!

¹³Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven.

¹⁴He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the LORD!

Nephila, also called golden or white orb-web spiders, are among the largest spiders in the world and spin some remarkable webs.

Nephila build very large webs about five or six feet off the ground, usually across wide, human-sized gaps between trees. Their silk is golden in color, and the webs are slightly angled to trap large insects more efficiently. Small birds are even known to have been caught. Sometimes trapped prey is strung in a line down the center of the web. Nephila are shy, not aggressive, and while their bite is painful, it is not life-threatening.

Perhaps the most striking fact about the Nephila's webs is the extreme strength of their silk. Natives in New Guinea even use it for fishing nets!

This unique spider is included in the call to praise God in Psalm 148. All of creation (spiders, too!) is urged to praise the Creator.

Psalm 148 is a call to praise the Lord and a catalog of who should do the praising: all created things (cf. Rev. 5:13). The first six verses cover the heavens, or things above the ground, such as angels, the sun, moon, and so on. Why should they praise God? Because "He commanded and they were created" (v. 5). Their origins display His power and sovereignty.

The next six verses focus on the earth, or things at ground level, such as the ocean, weather, mountains, birds, and people of every age and social status. While neither this list nor the previous one is exhaustive, they do represent in a poetic form every dimension of the created

world.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

“All Creatures of Our God and King” by Francis of Assisi was penned in the same spirit as Psalm 148. This would be a great hymn to learn! You might sing it as a family, or meditate on it as you commute to work. To get you started, here’s the first verse:

All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and with us sing, Alleluia! Alleluia!

Thou burning sun with golden beam, thou silver moon with softer gleam,

Lord God, we gather in Your presence to praise You with Your people, those who love You and earnestly desire to serve You every day. We confess that we have not always succeeded in our efforts to remain Your loyal and faithful servants. We have sometimes put our selfish desires first and have disregarded Your teachings. Today, we confess our sins, knowing that You will forgive us and restore our relationship with You through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Wednesday, March 30

Psalm 4

¹Answer me when I call, O God of my right! You gave me room when I was in distress. Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.

²How long, you people, shall my honor suffer shame? How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies? Selah

³But know that the LORD has set apart the faithful for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him.

⁴When you are disturbed, do not sin; ponder it on your beds, and be silent. Selah

⁵Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD.

⁶There are many who say, “O that we might see some good! Let the light of your face shine on us, O LORD!”

⁷You have put gladness in my heart more than when their grain and wine abound.

⁸I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety.

Three-year-old Gabby Gingras suffers from a nerve disorder called hereditary sensory autonomic neuropathy Type 5. It's so rare that only about 25 people in the entire United States are thought to have it. In this disorder, pain sensations are blocked from reaching the brain. Gabby might break a tooth or skin a knee, but she would feel nothing. As a result, she doesn't know when she's injured herself, and her parents must keep a watchful eye on her at all times. The pain that would warn another child doesn't exist for her.

Gabby's condition shows us that pain has a purpose in the natural world. The same is true in the spiritual world—God can use difficulties to teach and transform us. But it's still not easy or pleasant, and so we cry out for comfort as David did: "Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer" (v. 1). When we pray, there's no need to tiptoe around our real thoughts and feelings—we can urgently and directly call on God. Such boldness is a sign of faith. It shows we believe He's the kind of God who wants and is able to respond to our prayers, just as David believed God was righteous and merciful and would come to his aid. "Give me relief" literally means "make a spacious place for me," a picture of freedom and security.

Whatever the exact situation was that prompted David to write Psalm 4, the crisis clearly had a public dimension. Some people had turned to false idols and other delusions, which for their king meant his God-given glory was turned to shame (v. 2). They had made a huge mistake, though, for God keeps the promises He's made to the people He's chosen; therefore, He will surely answer the prayers of the godly. Godly people are ready to search their hearts and repent (v. 4), trust steadfastly, and worship rightly.

As we continue reading different psalms, you'll notice that the psalmist's body language is an important part of his prayer life. We might be used to kneeling or folding our hands. Such body language is meant to indicate humility, submission, and worship, though it sometimes becomes merely an unthinking habit.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your gracious love, shown to us most especially through Your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. You show Your love for all people in many ways, and You set us apart to serve You and others with hopeful hearts. Forgive us for those times when we have failed to serve You and others. Help us to see and walk through the doors of opportunity to serve You and others with gladness in our hearts. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit and help us minister to others with an integrity that manifests Your faithfulness, holiness, and mercy. Amen

Thursday, March 31

Psalm 26

¹Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.

²Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and mind.

³For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to you.

⁴I do not sit with the worthless, nor do I consort with hypocrites;

⁵I hate the company of evildoers, and will not sit with the wicked.

⁶I wash my hands in innocence, and go around your altar, O LORD,

⁷singing aloud a song of thanksgiving, and telling all your wondrous deeds.

⁸O LORD, I love the house in which you dwell, and the place where your glory abides.

⁹Do not sweep me away with sinners, nor my life with the bloodthirsty,

¹⁰those in whose hands are evil devices, and whose right hands are full of bribes.

¹¹But as for me, I walk in my integrity; redeem me, and be gracious to me.

¹²My foot stands on level ground; in the great congregation I will bless the LORD.

Constant complaining can injure a person's health, according to Dr. Matthew Budd of the Harvard Medical School, "There is no action, just anger and hostility. Chronic complainers put themselves in a heightened mood state that disrupts the physiology of the body. There is a higher risk of heart disease associated with anger and hostility. . . . People who complain a lot see themselves as victims. They are prone to an increased sense of hopelessness, which is tied to [stress and] depression."

The antidote for a complaining or bitter spirit is trust in the Lord, especially in His justice. Rather than worrying or becoming angry, we should follow David's example in today's reading and pray for vindication. His prayer is neatly summarized in verse 1, which is also our verse for today. The request—justice. The doer—God. The basis—the innocence and faith of the psalmist.

The plea of innocence was not a proud or blind one, for David confessed his sinfulness in other psalms. Here he invited God to examine him, preferred God's house over the "assembly of evildoers," and cited righteous actions as evidence of his worshipful heart. He didn't claim perfection, only a certainty that what he was suffering was undeserved.

Assuming God accepted his claim, and assuming His sovereign power as well, David renewed his prayer for vindication. David's righteousness could not save him—he needed the mercy and redemption of the Lord (v. 11). Verse 12 is a beautiful, confident conclusion: "My feet stand on level ground; in the great assembly I will praise the Lord." Level ground is smooth; there are no

hidden holes or stumbling blocks. In the same way, God's justice is the most secure place to take a stand.

Heavenly Father, we love to come into Your presence with praise and thanksgiving. We love to worship with each other, Your adopted children. We love to study Your Holy Word and strive to live faithfully in the world. Amen

Friday, April 1

Psalm 104

¹Bless the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great. You are clothed with honor and majesty,

²wrapped in light as with a garment. You stretch out the heavens like a tent,

³you set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot, you ride on the wings of the wind,

⁴you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers.

⁵You set the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be shaken.

⁶You cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains.

⁷At your rebuke they flee; at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.

⁸They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys to the place that you appointed for them.

⁹You set a boundary that they may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth.

¹⁰You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills,

¹¹giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst.

¹²By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches.

¹³From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

¹⁴You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth,

¹⁵and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart.

¹⁶The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.

¹⁷In them the birds build their nests; the stork has its home in the fir trees.

¹⁸The high mountains are for the wild goats; the rocks are a refuge for the coney.

¹⁹You have made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting.

²⁰You make darkness, and it is night, when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.

²¹The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God.

²²When the sun rises, they withdraw and lie down in their dens.

²³People go out to their work and to their labor until the evening.

²⁴O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

²⁵Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great.

²⁶There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

²⁷These all look to you to give them their food in due season;

²⁸when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

²⁹When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

³⁰When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.

³¹May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works—

³²who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke.

³³I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being.

³⁴May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the LORD.

³⁵Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless the LORD, O my soul. Praise the LORD!

Isle Royale has no human inhabitants, yet the remote Lake Superior island teems with life. Ferns and wild orchids cluster on the moist shores of inlets. Ground flowers of all shapes and colors tapestry the forest floor. Birch and red pine tower above rocky paths, providing welcome shade. Moose bathe in the shelter of evening fog, while morning glimpses fox and wolf tracks on the trail. They all find sufficient food and shelter on this island.

Psalm 104 celebrates the variety of living creatures God has made and His loving provision for them. All creatures, from man to goats to birds to pine trees, wait on the Lord for their food and life. All creatures, humans included, intimately depend on God's spirit for their very existence (vv. 27–30). Jesus showed that God cares for sparrows, rebukes fig trees, and commands wind and water.

What kind of existence does dependence on God create? Verse 16 says, "The trees of the Lord are well-watered . . ." or as the King James Version says more forcefully, "full of sap." God desires abundant life for all His creatures. God's trees are not dried-up, dead sticks. No, the trees of the Lord are pulsating with life, full of juice, creative, and reproductive.

We are the trees of God. As Psalm 1 says, we are to be like trees planted by streams of water. Who is this living water? The Spirit. Jesus said, "If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (John 7:37). John added, "By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive" (John 7:38–39).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Are you full of sap? Or do you say with the eunuch, "I am only a dry tree" (Isa. 56:3)? Perhaps you need the refreshment that only the Holy Spirit can provide.

Father God, You created all things. You created a beautiful world for us to enjoy; a world designed to meet our physical needs. Then, when we sinned and dishonored You, You sent Your only Son to meet our spiritual needs. All that we truly enjoy comes from Your hand. Amen

Saturday, April 2

Psalm 33

¹Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous. Praise befits the upright.

²Praise the LORD with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings.

³Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.

⁴For the word of the LORD is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness.

⁵He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.

⁶By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.

⁷He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle; he put the deeps in storehouses.

⁸Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.

⁹For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

¹⁰The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples.

¹¹The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.

¹²Happy is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage.

¹³The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all humankind.

¹⁴From where he sits enthroned he watches all the inhabitants of the earth—

¹⁵he who fashions the hearts of them all, and observes all their deeds.

¹⁶A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.

¹⁷The war horse is a vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save.

¹⁸Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love,

¹⁹to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.

²⁰Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and shield.

²¹Our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name.

²²Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you.

Poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow called the rituals of life "secret anniversaries of the heart." He was referring to the moments, the remembrances, and the routines that add meaning to daily life.

We hope each day this month is an "anniversary of the heart" for you as we celebrate the faithfulness of our loving God. Today's reading suggests a ritual that will enhance your celebration and add new meaning to these days leading up to Thanksgiving. The Bible calls us to "sing joyfully to the Lord" (v. 1).

The psalmist's call is to those who are "righteous" and "upright," terms that describe those who are in right standing before God. In New Testament terms, these are people who have joyfully received God's forgiveness and cleansing for sin by putting their faith in Christ and His work on the cross. That's something worth singing about!

The song is "new" (v. 3) because nothing like our redemption in Christ has ever been seen before. The psalmist refers to this new song prophetically--it will be sung when the risen and exalted Christ opens the scroll in heaven (Rev. 5:9-10). Notice that the subject of the song is Christ's worthiness because He is the Redeemer.

As we return to Psalm 33, we are urged to sing praises to God because His Word is true and "He is faithful in all He does." That applies to anything that could happen to us, regardless of whether it seems good or bad from our perspective.

In other words, God's faithfulness is not an escape hatch from trouble or temptation. Rather, we have the rock of His person and His promises to cling to in any kind of storm. God's faithfulness also means we never have to question His motive in allowing trials in our lives (James 1:2-4). He remains righteous and just in everything He does--no exceptions.

In verse 5 we are introduced to one of the greatest manifestations of God's faithfulness: His "unfailing love," which God will never rescind or recall, no matter what happens. Remember this word, because we will meet it again and again. Because of God's loyal love, we can sing

joyfully to Him.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The psalmist says it is "fitting" that God's people should sing a song of praise to Him.

That means praise is appropriate anytime and anywhere for those who know God and have enjoyed His faithfulness in their lives. Why not sing to the Lord right now? Praise Him through your favorite hymn or chorus. Or, turn to Revelation 5:9-14 and let the words of heaven's "new song" refresh your heart. Praise God for His salvation, and for the promise that His unfailing love is yours in any situation.

O God, we rejoice in Your presence today and praise You for all that You have made. We give You thanks for watching over us daily and meeting all of our needs. We give You special thanks for making yourself known to us through the world You have made, but Father, we thank You even more for teaching us about yourself through the Bible, Your word written. Thank You for demonstrating Your loving grace to us through Your only Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

Sunday, April 3 ~ Fourth Sunday in Lent

Psalm 86

¹Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.

²Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you; save your servant who trusts in you. You are my God;

³be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I cry all day long.

⁴Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

⁵For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.

⁶Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; listen to my cry of supplication.

⁷In the day of my trouble I call on you, for you will answer me.

⁸There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours.

⁹All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.

¹⁰For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God.

¹¹Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name.

¹²I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever.

¹³For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

¹⁴O God, the insolent rise up against me; a band of ruffians seeks my life, and they do not set you before them.

¹⁵But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

¹⁶Turn to me and be gracious to me; give your strength to your servant; save the child of your serving girl.

¹⁷Show me a sign of your favor, so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame, because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

In the strong name of Jesus Christ I stand against the world, the flesh, and the devil. . . . I reject the distorted concepts and ideas that make sin plausible and desirable. I oppose every attempt to keep me from knowing full fellowship with God. . . . These things I pray for the sake of him who loved me and gave himself for me. Amen.—Richard Foster, *Prayer*

There is a growing recognition in the medical community of the role of prayer in physical healing. Many medical professionals who have no other explanation for a patient's recovery are willing to credit prayer.

As Christians, we shouldn't be surprised by this close connection—today's passage from 2 Kings records one such healing, and Jesus' incarnational ministry was filled with healings. Also, the gospels show that physical and spiritual healing may be closely connected.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In his book, *Prayer*, Richard Foster offers insights on physical healing, cautioning Christians to avoid the extremes of seeking medical means without prayer or seeking prayer while ignoring

medical help. Foster documents miraculous healings, yet he frankly admits that healing is a mystery and discourages believers from blaming themselves when healing does not occur.

Foster outlines four steps for healing prayer, appropriate for both emotional and physical healing. First, listen. “We listen to people, and we listen to God” for more discernment. Second, pray. “This is the step of faith. As we come to clearness about what is needed, we invite God’s healing to come.” Third, believe. “This is the step of assurance. . . . We focus on [his] trustworthiness and especially on his steadfast love.” Fourth, give thanks. “This is the step of gratitude. . . . Gratitude is often very powerful.”

If you seek healing, consider also asking the elders of your church to pray for you, as outlined in James 5:14–15.

Heavenly Father, we eagerly anticipate the coming celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. May we so live as to show forth His love and grace to others in all that we say and do, that they might come to love Him as we do. Amen

Monday, April 4

Psalm 8

¹O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.

²Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.

³When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;

⁴what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

⁵Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.

⁶You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,

⁷all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,

⁸the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

⁹O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

William F. M. Buscombe had a passion for the stars. After his doctoral studies, he worked in Australia and was a pioneer in studying and classifying stars in the southern hemisphere. Later he taught at Northwestern University near Chicago. Since this is a difficult place to do astronomy, he compiled data from other researchers. The star catalog he published, *MK Spectral Classifications*, is considered a standard reference work in the field. He was working on the sixteenth edition when he died early last year.

As a young man, Buscombe left his agnosticism to become a practicing Quaker, or Friend, a faith he retained throughout his life. He studied the stars, and he studied their Creator. So can we! Today's psalm is a familiar one, perhaps so familiar you didn't realize it's a prayer addressed directly to the Lord. This prayer exalts God's "majesty," a term that can also be translated "noble," "magnificent," or "glorious." David perceived God's majesty in His creation, especially humanity, creation's crown jewel (vv. 3–5; cf. Heb. 2:6–8). Recognizing God's power and artistry displayed in the natural world, he marveled that He used His own "fingers" to set the stars in place.

Even more astounding than the galaxies of stars is what God has done with and for humanity. He has been "mindful" of us, that is, remembered us in the sense of loving and caring for us. He created us, "crowned" us by making us in His image, and appointed us as rulers or stewards over the rest of the created world (cf. Gen. 1:28–30). As amazed as he is by the splendor of nature, David was even more amazed by the relational love God has shown and proved towards us. Even children must be able to see and respond to such an obvious truth, a fact that heaps coals on the heads of those who oppose God (v. 2; cf. Matt. 21:16; Rom. 1:19–20).

Step outdoors for your prayer time today, and revel in the glory of God as seen in creation. If you're in an urban area, this application may take extra effort, but perhaps you can find a park or other natural setting.

Heavenly Father, we honor You as the Great Creator, the Lord of the universe, and the Ruler over all. You reign far above us; and yet, You have invited us into Your family and You have told us to come to You as our Heavenly Father. We stand amazed, O Lord, that You care for us. We give You thanks for putting a portion of wonderful Your creation into our hands. Help us take our rightful place as Your children and care for all You have made with a mind and heart aligned with Your purposes. Amen

Tuesday, April 5

Psalm 92

¹It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High;
²to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night,
³to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre.
⁴For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy.
⁵How great are your works, O LORD! Your thoughts are very deep!
⁶The dullard cannot know, the stupid cannot understand this:
⁷though the wicked sprout like grass and all evildoers flourish, they are doomed to destruction forever,
⁸but you, O LORD, are on high forever.
⁹For your enemies, O LORD, for your enemies shall perish; all evildoers shall be scattered.
¹⁰But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox; you have poured over me fresh oil.
¹¹My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies; my ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants.
¹²The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
¹³They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God.
¹⁴In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap,
¹⁵showing that the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

Recent sociological studies have shown that, in general, people of faith live longer and are happier. To worshipers of God, rooted in the true Vine, this should come as no surprise. Our scriptural hymnbook, the Psalms, written centuries before modern studies, suggests the connection between praising God and living joyously.

Psalms 92 in particular links worship and flourishing. Worship is, among other things, recognizing and naming God's goodness: His works, deeds, and faithfulness (v. 4). To worship God with our whole being is to regain a proper perspective on our life and the One who holds it. This psalm is

written for the Sabbath day--a day of worship, a day dedicated to God.

The psalm contrasts the senseless man with the worshiper of God. They differ in perception and in longevity. The senseless man is ignorant of his own transience. He does not know that despite flourishing like grass, his life is temporary (v. 7).

This contrasts with the worshiper of God who knows that "it is good to praise the Lord" (v. 1). The worshiper isn't senseless like the other man, but knows that God's thoughts are "profound" and that He is "exalted forever" (vv. 5, 8). This joy in the Lord and His deeds causes eternal praise and adoration. The worshiper is seen as a tree taking root in God's house, a secure and sheltered place. "The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God" (vv. 12, 13).

Being rooted in praise, says the psalm, leads to a life of fruitfulness. Unlike the senseless man who withers like grass, the righteous will "still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green" (v. 14).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The psalmist writes that it is "good to praise the Lord . . . to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night" (vv. 1-2). Consider reading this psalm of praise aloud to the Lord; read it several times until you are able to offer it as your prayer. Then proclaim His love--for you, your family, neighbors, co-workers, friends--and His faithfulness. What are concrete ways in which God has recently shown you His love and faithfulness that you could share with someone else? Be sure to make note of them.

O God, You are the delight and joy of our lives. You never fail us, though we sometimes fail You. Though we sometimes sin against You and others, You always love and forgive us when we come to You. Fill us now with Your Holy Spirit, and heal all our disease and diseases. Amen

Wednesday, April 6

Psalm 52

¹Why do you boast, O mighty one, of mischief done against the godly? All day long

²you are plotting destruction. Your tongue is like a sharp razor, you worker of treachery.

³You love evil more than good, and lying more than speaking the truth. Selah

⁴You love all words that devour, O deceitful tongue.

⁵But God will break you down forever; he will snatch and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living. Selah

⁶The righteous will see, and fear, and will laugh at the evildoer, saying,

⁷“See the one who would not take refuge in God, but trusted in abundant riches, and sought refuge in wealth!”

⁸But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever.

⁹I will thank you forever, because of what you have done. In the presence of the faithful I will proclaim your name, for it is good.

David was on the run from Saul. While fleeing, he stopped by the town of Nob to pick up supplies and guidance from Ahimelech the priest. Doeg the Edomite, Saul’s “head shepherd,” spotted David in the temple and reported Ahimelech’s apparent treason to Saul--who then called the priests of Nob and had Doeg put them to death. He killed 85 priests and decimated the entire town (1 Sam. 22:9-23). Psalm 52 is David’s outcry against Doeg’s action.

The content of Psalm 52 is all the more remarkable for its context. Spoken by David, the fleeing outlaw, to Doeg, the high court official of the current king, it reveals David’s unswerving faith in the God of Israel and his ability to see beyond the crisis of the present moment.

Verses 1–4 describe Doeg’s evil in terms of his speech. His tongue “plots destruction” and cuts the innocent like a “sharpened razor.” He delights in untruth and the “harmful word,” and boasts of his evil.

The consequence of his evil, spelled out in verses 5–7, is ultimate ruin. He will be torn from his tent by God, brought down, uprooted from the living--when he least expects it. His trust in wealth and his destruction of others will prove to be false strongholds (v. 7), and the righteous, confident in God’s power, will laugh at the unmasking of his weakness.

The final two verses assert that the only true stronghold is the Lord. The temporary “power” of the man who trusts in himself for his security contrasts with the eternal security of the man who trusts in the Lord’s unfailing love. David, though on the run, envisions himself as a securely rooted olive tree, “flourishing in the house of God” (v. 8). Olive trees live for hundreds of years! Even though David’s life seemed transient, he knew that God’s love for him provided security.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Psalm 52 is an exercise of faith. In a difficult situation, David nonetheless declares God's power, mercy, and goodness and affirms his trust in Him.

Lord Jesus, I see the evidence of Your loving grace all around me, and especially in the hearts and lives of Your people. By Your grace, I have placed my faith in You for salvation and daily provision in this life. Make me wise in You. Amen

Thursday, April 7

Psalm 127

¹Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.

²It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives sleep to his beloved.

³Sons are indeed a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.

⁴Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one's youth.

⁵Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them. He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

A skilled potter once told a friend that he decided which kind of project to work on based on how tired or rested he was. The potter said that when he was tired and overworked, he didn't have the focus or the patience to make something beautiful, so he tended to make very ordinary pots. But when he was rested, he was ready to tackle a project that required much attention to detail.

Most people do their best work when they're rested. None of us can work indefinitely without feeling the harmful effects or making costly mistakes. Rest is not a luxury. God created in us a necessity for rest and recuperation.

God not only designed people to rest one day a week, He commanded it. And He gave us the best example of all when He rested from His work of creating the universe (Gen. 2:2-3). For Israel, the importance of the Sabbath was determined when God made it the fourth of His Ten Commandments. The Sabbath wasn't just a day to relax in the lawn chair--it was a holy day of service and worship.

Some people disagree about whether we should keep the seventh day. But the church's day of

worship is the first day, the Lord's day (Rev. 1:10). Many believers also practice God's principle of rest on this day.

So the precaution for today is, don't forget to rest. There are many good reasons to take a day off from work, including the mental and physical recharge a day of rest gives us. We also need to give the people who work for and with us their opportunity for rest.

But resting involves more than the benefits to body and mind. First, it's an issue of honoring and obeying God. When we rest from our work we imitate God's example, and take Him at His word that He knows what we need better than we do.

Heavenly Father, many times we weep in sorrow and weep with those who weep. As we turn our thoughts to You and Your promises, turn our sorrow into joy. When we work hard to meet the needs of our families, others and ourselves, please give us good success and rejoicing in the fruit of our labors. We pray that you would build and guard our homes as we pray and trust in You. Fill us with your Spirit so we will walk in Your ways. Teach us to pray in faith. Amen

Friday, April 8

Psalm 23

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

Commenting on Psalm 23, Bible teacher Charles Swindoll says sheep need three things before they can be at rest. First, they need to be within sight of the shepherd. If they can't see the shepherd, sheep will stand up looking until they collapse from exhaustion. Second, sheep need the safety of the flock. Even a sheep that is tired and hungry will not stop wandering if it is

alone. Third, sheep need freedom from predators. As long as a wolf or a lion is near them, sheep will not lie down or eat.

What a picture of our need for Christ! It's obvious from this list of needs that we, as sheep, can't possibly take care of ourselves. Praise God for a faithful Shepherd who is always there to keep us safe.

The words and images of Psalm 23 have probably been reproduced, represented, and illustrated in more ways than any other passage of Scripture. But if we're not careful, these powerful verses that speak of real life can be sentimentalized until we begin to think that David is talking about a dreamy "neverland" where all is peace and light.

Dr. Swindoll's wise insights jar us from that mistaken notion. The landscape of Psalm 23 is not a dreamland, but the reality of a world that can be very hard on defenseless sheep.

The serenity of this psalm is undeniable. But its peace is enhanced, not diminished, when we realize that the Shepherd who provides cool water, green pasture, and safe passage for His sheep does so in spite of many threats.

There is the threat of becoming lost, for instance, which the shepherd deals with by His guiding hand that holds the rod and staff to keep sheep on the right path and lift a lost sheep from a crevice. There is also the danger of infection from injury, which the shepherd treats by anointing the sheep with healing oil.

For us, the "valley of the shadow of death" is the ultimate enemy (see 1 Cor. 15:26). But even in the day-to-day experiences of life, we are in the presence of our enemies. Yet God keeps us safe in the face of all these threats. Do you have a new appreciation for God's faithfulness to you today? Tell Him about it!

The opposite of rest and peace is worry and anxiety.

What are you worried about today? It's hard to be at peace when your heart and mind are being tossed around by fear and worry. It usually doesn't help to tell someone, "Quit worrying." So we want to suggest the opposite! Go ahead and take five minutes today for some serious worrying. Lay out your fears; name your concerns. But after you have worried about them, take them to your Shepherd. Pray the promises of Psalm 23 back to Him--and see if your worries look as big.

Lord Jesus, risen from the dead and reigning forevermore. We praise You and honor You this day for Your great sacrifice in our behalf. You left Your heavenly throne for us, and not only walked through the life we live daily, fighting spiritual foes and temptations common to us, but for the joy set before You died the shameful death of hanging of a cross. We trust You with our hopes

and future, knowing as Your first disciples understood, that there is no one other than You to whom we can reasonably and faithfully go for everlasting life. Amen

Saturday, April 9

Psalm 45

¹My heart overflows with a goodly theme; I address my verses to the king; my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe.

²You are the most handsome of men; grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever.

³Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one, in your glory and majesty.

⁴In your majesty ride on victoriously for the cause of truth and to defend the right; let your right hand teach you dread deeds.

⁵Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; the peoples fall under you.

⁶Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever. Your royal scepter is a scepter of equity;

⁷you love righteousness and hate wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions;

⁸your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia. From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad;

⁹daughters of kings are among your ladies of honor; at your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir.

¹⁰Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your people and your father's house,

¹¹and the king will desire your beauty. Since he is your lord, bow to him;

¹²the people of Tyre will seek your favor with gifts, the richest of the people

¹³with all kinds of wealth. The princess is decked in her chamber with gold-woven robes;

¹⁴in many-colored robes she is led to the king; behind her the virgins, her companions, follow.

¹⁵With joy and gladness they are led along as they enter the palace of the king.

¹⁶In the place of ancestors you, O king, shall have sons; you will make them princes in all the earth.

¹⁷I will cause your name to be celebrated in all generations; therefore the peoples will praise you forever and ever.

The entire person of Jesus is but as one gem, and his life is all along but one impression of the seal. He is altogether complete; not only in his several parts, but as a gracious all-glorious whole. His character is not a mass of fair colours mixed confusedly, nor a heap of precious stones laid carelessly one upon another; he is a picture of beauty and a breastplate of glory. In him, all the “things of good repute” are in their proper places, and assist in adorning each other. Not one feature in his glorious person attracts attention at the expense of others; but he is perfectly and altogether lovely.

Oh, Jesus! thy power, thy grace, thy justice, thy tenderness, thy truth, thy majesty, and thine immutability make up such a man, or rather such a God-man, as neither heaven nor earth hath seen elsewhere. Thy infancy, thy eternity, thy sufferings, thy triumphs, thy death, and thine immortality, are all woven in one gorgeous tapestry, without seam or rent. Thou art music without discord; thou art many, and yet not divided; thou art all things, and yet not diverse. As all the colours blend into one resplendent rainbow, so all the glories of heaven and earth meet in thee, and unite so wondrously, that there is none like thee in all things; nay, if all the virtues of the most excellent were bound in one bundle, they could not rival thee, thou mirror of all perfection. Thou hast been anointed with the holy oil of myrrh and cassia, which thy God hath reserved for thee alone; and as for thy fragrance, it is as the holy perfume, the like of which none other can ever mingle, even with the art of the apothecary; each spice is fragrant, but the compound is divine.

“Oh, sacred symmetry! oh, rare connection
Of many perfects, to make one perfection!
Oh, heavenly music, where all parts do meet
In one sweet strain, to make one perfect sweet!”

Heavenly Father, our hearts overflow with love for You. Our love for You is a holy love; the love that You first poured into our hearts. We only return to You what You have first given to us: love, friendship, grace upon grace. We pledge our lives to Your service. We pray that by the power of Your indwelling Spirit we will remain loyal to You always. Help us share the good news of Jesus’ coming and His saving sacrifice with those who do not know Him. Help us demonstrate His

resurrection life by the way we witness for Him in our words and ways. We thank You for Your presence with us. Amen

Sunday, April 10 ~ Fifth Sunday in Lent

Psalm 89

¹I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

²I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

³You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant David:

⁴"I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations.'" Selah

⁵Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones.

⁶For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD,

⁷a God feared in the council of the holy ones, great and awesome above all that are around him?

⁸O LORD God of hosts, who is as mighty as you, O LORD? Your faithfulness surrounds you.

⁹You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.

¹⁰You crushed Rahab like a carcass; you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm.

¹¹The heavens are yours, the earth also is yours; the world and all that is in it—you have founded them.

¹²The north and the south—you created them; Tabor and Hermon joyously praise your name.

¹³You have a mighty arm; strong is your hand, high your right hand.

¹⁴Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.

¹⁵Happy are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O LORD, in the light of your countenance;

¹⁶they exult in your name all day long, and extol your righteousness.

¹⁷For you are the glory of their strength; by your favor our horn is exalted.

¹⁸For our shield belongs to the LORD, our king to the Holy One of Israel.

¹⁹Then you spoke in a vision to your faithful one, and said: "I have set the crown on one who is mighty, I have exalted one chosen from the people.

²⁰I have found my servant David; with my holy oil I have anointed him;

²¹my hand shall always remain with him; my arm also shall strengthen him.

²²The enemy shall not outwit him, the wicked shall not humble him.

²³I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him.

²⁴My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him; and in my name his horn shall be exalted.

²⁵I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers.

²⁶He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!'

²⁷I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.

²⁸Forever I will keep my steadfast love for him, and my covenant with him will stand firm.

²⁹I will establish his line forever, and his throne as long as the heavens endure.

³⁰If his children forsake my law and do not walk according to my ordinances,

³¹if they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments,

³²then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with scourges;

³³but I will not remove from him my steadfast love, or be false to my faithfulness.

³⁴I will not violate my covenant, or alter the word that went forth from my lips.

³⁵Once and for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David.

³⁶His line shall continue forever, and his throne endure before me like the sun.

³⁷It shall be established forever like the moon, an enduring witness in the skies.” Selah

³⁸But now you have spurned and rejected him; you are full of wrath against your anointed.

³⁹You have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown in the dust.

⁴⁰You have broken through all his walls; you have laid his strongholds in ruins.

⁴¹All who pass by plunder him; he has become the scorn of his neighbors.

⁴²You have exalted the right hand of his foes; you have made all his enemies rejoice.

⁴³Moreover, you have turned back the edge of his sword, and you have not supported him in battle.

⁴⁴You have removed the scepter from his hand, and hurled his throne to the ground.

⁴⁵You have cut short the days of his youth; you have covered him with shame. Selah

⁴⁶How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire?

⁴⁷Remember how short my time is— for what vanity you have created all mortals!

⁴⁸Who can live and never see death? Who can escape the power of Sheol? Selah

⁴⁹Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?

⁵⁰Remember, O Lord, how your servant is taunted; how I bear in my bosom the insults of the peoples,

⁵¹with which your enemies taunt, O LORD, with which they taunted the footsteps of your anointed.

⁵²Blessed be the LORD forever. Amen and Amen.

TODAY IN THE WORD

A report earlier this year from the United Bible Societies in England stated that during 1997, at least part of the Bible was made available in thirty new languages worldwide. This work brought the total number of languages that have some portion of God's Word to an increase of more than two hundred languages in the past four years!

Ethan the Ezrahite would have been happy to hear this good news from the Bible translation front. The author of Psalm 89 wanted the world to hear the good news of God's faithfulness and love to all generations.

In fact, the verses we read today make it clear that faithfulness was a mark of God's character long before the earth was ever established. Throughout eternity, the love and grace of God have been on display. In fact, God established His faithfulness "in heaven itself" (v. 2).

If we could have stood in a corner of heaven before earth was established--and indeed still today--we would have heard the testimony of "the holy ones" (v. 7), saying that no one in heaven could compare to God. These holy beings, including the angels and the living beings and elders described in Revelation, have always had only one item on their agenda for discussion: the awesome nature of the God they worship day and night.

Since God's love and faithfulness are securely established in heaven, do you think we have any real reason to worry about what happens on earth? The writer of Psalm 89 and the angels would answer no.

As a matter of fact, today's reading gives us a great example of God's attention to the earth. To illustrate the Lord's faithfulness, the writer mentioned the eternal covenant God made with David to establish his throne forever.

This is a covenant that reaches out to include all people, because the eternal throne God promised to David's descendants will one day be occupied by Jesus Christ when He comes to rule in His millennial kingdom (see the November 3 study).

Consider the joy and wonder experienced by the people in our opening illustration who have just received God's Word in their language for the first time. Now they can join us in celebrating God's faithfulness, which will stand for eternity!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Many pastors end their Sunday worship services with a benediction that encourages the people to go out and tell someone else about the Lord.

Preparing us to be witnesses is one goal of worship and the ministry of the church. The psalmist was eager to let the world know about his faithful God. You probably know someone who needs to know Jesus Christ. Write this person's name on your calendar for the week, and begin today asking God for a divine appointment to share His love and faithfulness.

O God, our Creator and Redeemer, we not only offer our praises to You this day, but our very selves as well. We come into Your presence with the humility befitting unworthy sinners that You have so graciously forgiven. We thank You for the gift of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, the One who makes new life possible to believers no matter what their past. Fill us now with Your Spirit that we might live wholly for You and serve Your people. Amen

Monday, April 11

Psalm 118

¹Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness.

²Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?"

³Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases.

⁴Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands.

⁵They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see.

⁶They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell.

⁷They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; they make no sound in their throats.

⁸Those who make them are like them; so are all who trust in them.

⁹O Israel, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield.

¹⁰O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield.

¹¹You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield.

¹²The LORD has been mindful of us; he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron;

¹³he will bless those who fear the LORD, both small and great.

¹⁴May the LORD give you increase, both you and your children.

¹⁵May you be blessed by the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

¹⁶The heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the earth he has given to human beings.

¹⁷The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any that go down into silence.

¹⁸But we will bless the LORD from this time on and forevermore. Praise the LORD!

O Lord of Hosts, you are Lord alone. You have made the heavens and the earth and all living things that dwell there. Your hand is the soul of every living thing. I would come before you with worship and honor this day. In the name of Christ I pray. Amen.—Bob Benson Sr. and Michael Benson, *Disciplines for the Inner Life*

In his book, *The God Who Hears*, Bingham Hunter writes, “At its root, prayer grows from the certainty of God’s omnipotence and sovereignty.” If we didn’t believe that the Lord was in charge, we probably wouldn’t waste our time praying.

Yet many Christians struggle with God’s sovereignty and the question, “Why don’t I get what I pray for?” Sometimes unanswered prayer is the result of wrong motives, but some unanswered prayer simply defies our comprehension. For this reason, it’s important to consider God’s sovereignty along with His goodness.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

God’s sovereignty and the mystery of unanswered prayer leads some Christians to ask, “Why bother to pray at all?” God’s power could make prayer seem pointless, if the purpose of prayer were simply to get things done. Although popular sayings such as, “prayer changes things,” are certainly well-intentioned, it might be better to say “God changes things” and “prayer changes us.” This shifts the focus of prayer from results to relationship. Understanding God’s sovereignty in this light enables us to pray with confidence, because we know that God is both sovereign and committed to our good.

“Prayer problems are usually not intellectual, but volitional,” writes Bingham Hunter. Not surprisingly then, one of the ways prayer changes us is to align our will increasingly with the Father’s will, which eventually brings us to a deeper level of submission to Him.

Take time today to ponder and reflect on God’s sovereignty and prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any misunderstandings you may have. Then pray along with the following prayer:

Lord, I am yours; I do yield myself up entirely to you, and I believe that you do take me. I leave myself with you. Work in me all the good pleasure of your will, and I will only lie still in your hands and trust you. Amen.

—Hannah Whithall Smith, *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life*

O Lord God, we gather here to give You glory; to praise You for Your holiness and love. You have shown Your faithfulness to us by sending Your only Son from heaven to Earth for us. He taught us how to live, and then He died for us, because we have not lived as we ought. Fill us with His Spirit that we might begin to treat others as He treated us. Protect us from the evil one, who would make us like himself, and hear us as we pray. Amen

Tuesday, April 12

Psalm 35

¹Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me!

²Take hold of shield and buckler, and rise up to help me!

³Draw the spear and javelin against my pursuers; say to my soul, “I am your salvation.”

⁴Let them be put to shame and dishonor who seek after my life. Let them be turned back and confounded who devise evil against me.

⁵Let them be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the LORD driving them on.

⁶Let their way be dark and slippery, with the angel of the LORD pursuing them.

⁷For without cause they hid their net for me; without cause they dug a pit for my life.

⁸Let ruin come on them unawares. And let the net that they hid ensnare them; let them fall in it—to their ruin.

⁹Then my soul shall rejoice in the LORD, exulting in his deliverance.

¹⁰All my bones shall say, “O LORD, who is like you? You deliver the weak from those too strong for them, the weak and needy from those who despoil them.”

¹¹Malicious witnesses rise up; they ask me about things I do not know.

¹²They repay me evil for good; my soul is forlorn.

¹³But as for me, when they were sick, I wore sackcloth; I afflicted myself with fasting. I prayed with head bowed on my bosom,

¹⁴as though I grieved for a friend or a brother; I went about as one who laments for a mother, bowed down and in mourning.

¹⁵But at my stumbling they gathered in glee, they gathered together against me; ruffians whom I did not know tore at me without ceasing;

¹⁶they impiously mocked more and more, gnashing at me with their teeth.

¹⁷How long, O LORD, will you look on? Rescue me from their ravages, my life from the lions!

¹⁸Then I will thank you in the great congregation; in the mighty throng I will praise you.

¹⁹Do not let my treacherous enemies rejoice over me, or those who hate me without cause wink the eye.

²⁰For they do not speak peace, but they conceive deceitful words against those who are quiet in the land.

²¹They open wide their mouths against me; they say, "Aha, Aha, our eyes have seen it."

²²You have seen, O LORD; do not be silent! O Lord, do not be far from me!

²³Wake up! Bestir yourself for my defense, for my cause, my God and my Lord!

²⁴Vindicate me, O LORD, my God, according to your righteousness, and do not let them rejoice over me.

²⁵Do not let them say to themselves, "Aha, we have our heart's desire." Do not let them say, "We have swallowed you up."

²⁶Let all those who rejoice at my calamity be put to shame and confusion; let those who exalt themselves against me be clothed with shame and dishonor.

²⁷Let those who desire my vindication shout for joy and be glad, and say evermore, “Great is the LORD, who delights in the welfare of his servant.”

²⁸Then my tongue shall tell of your righteousness and of your praise all day long.

In times of war, soldiers and generals often become popular heroes. Their brave exploits frequently attain legendary status. During World War II, General Douglas MacArthur came to signify firm, unflinching resolve when he left the Philippines declaring, “I will return.”

When he did, in fact, return to liberate the Philippines from Japanese control, a famous photo of him wading ashore captured the American sense of commitment to be defenders of freedom against aggression.

Today’s reading portrays God as a divine Warrior or Defender. David calls on the Lord to come to his aid, picturing him as a mighty, rescuing soldier wielding all-powerful weapons (vv. 1-3). The king, himself a famous military commander, knew that his successes and victories resulted not from human strength, but from God’s supernatural power (2 Sam. 22).

This passage alternates between accusations against the wicked and prayers for God to save the psalmist. David’s enemies had attacked him without cause, so he hoped their downfall would be sudden and complete. They repaid evil for good, betrayed friendship, made false accusations, and took malicious delight in all of it.

Showing faith in God’s righteousness, David prayed that his enemies would be routed: “God, come and fight for me! Vindicate me! Defend me! Strap on your armor and rush to my aid!” When that day comes, he said, “My tongue will speak of your righteousness and of your praises all day long” (v. 28).

God fights on behalf of His people, as He did to bring Israel out of Egypt. On the eve of the battle of Jericho, He appeared to Joshua as the commander of the heavenly hosts. He uses His might to help widows and orphans (Prov. 23:10-11). As a warrior, He also opposes His people when they follow false gods and sinful lifestyles.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Memorizing Bible verses is an excellent way to encourage ourselves with truth. To strengthen your faith with the thought that God is our Warrior or Defender, why not memorize one of the less familiar verses or cross-references from today’s reading?

We recommend the brief prayer of Psalm 35:23: “Awake, and rise to my defense! Contend for me, my God and Lord.”

O God, we give You thanks for Your guidance, protection, and provision. Our ancestors came to this country to worship You freely. We pray that You will enable and empower us to serve You

with true freedom according to the holy scriptures. Help us to faithfully represent Jesus Christ, the Captain of our Salvation, at every opportunity. Amen

Wednesday, April 13

Psalm 28

¹To you, O LORD, I call; my rock, do not refuse to hear me, for if you are silent to me, I shall be like those who go down to the Pit.

²Hear the voice of my supplication, as I cry to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary.

³Do not drag me away with the wicked, with those who are workers of evil, who speak peace with their neighbors, while mischief is in their hearts.

⁴Repay them according to their work, and according to the evil of their deeds; repay them according to the work of their hands; render them their due reward.

⁵Because they do not regard the works of the LORD, or the work of his hands, he will break them down and build them up no more.

⁶Blessed be the LORD, for he has heard the sound of my pleadings.

⁷The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts; so I am helped, and my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.

⁸The LORD is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed.

⁹O save your people, and bless your heritage; be their shepherd, and carry them forever.

An annual survey by Massachusetts Institute of Technology asks Americans what invention they hate most but can't live without. This year, the cell phone earned this dubious distinction, with the alarm clock and television as runners-up. A full 30 percent of the survey's respondents named the cell phone as the top "love it, hate it" part of their lives. They like the freedom it gives them to communicate, but dislike the feeling that they are never away from work or truly alone.

Just as we may hate it but feel still we need a cell phone, because of pride we hate to ask for God's mercy, even though we know we need it. In today's psalm, we find a model prayer for

mercy. It begins with a call to the Lord. He's the only one who can hear and answer, and encouragingly, He certainly will answer—He's a dependable Rock. To David, an unanswered prayer would be like death (v. 1). He went on to acknowledge God's justice with fear and trembling. Evil people show no respect for the Lord and would be torn down. David knew that he had done wrong, but he still honored and worshiped God and prayed not to share their terrible fate.

The psalmist had such confidence in answered prayer that he immediately rejoiced in the gift of God's mercy: "My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to Him in song" (v. 7). Why did God say yes? Because it is in His nature to do so. He is the strength and shield of His people, a "fortress of salvation" for His chosen king. When we as weak people need help, forgiveness, protection, and so much more, God delights to answer our trusting prayers with His power, wisdom, and love.

In response to the final line of today's psalm, sing "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us" to close your time of personal devotions and prayer. Singing hymns and choruses as part of your devotions can add another dimension to your walk with the Lord. If you don't have a hymnbook at home, you can buy one at your local Christian bookstore. Because they are printed in large quantities, many are quite inexpensive. Purchase one soon and begin putting it to good use!

O God, Creator and Sustainer of all, we praise You for creating us and maintaining our existence in this beautiful world that You have made. We thank You for the gift of eternal life by grace through faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We eagerly await the happiness that life eternal promises, and we pray that You will help us share this good news effectively with those who do not know You. Amen

Thursday, April 14

Psalm 128

¹Happy is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways.

²You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you.

³Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table.

⁴Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.

⁵The LORD bless you from Zion. May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.

⁶May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

Newspaper columnist and minister George Crane tells about an irate woman who came to his office. She was determined to get a divorce, but told Crane that first she wanted to hurt her husband as much as he had hurt her. Crane advised her to go home and start acting like she really loved her husband--praising him for his good traits, being kind and courteous, going out of her way to please him. "After you've done that," Crane said, "then drop the divorce bomb. That will really hurt him."

The woman did this, and came back two months later. "Get a divorce? Never! I discovered I really do love him."

Obviously, not every troubled marriage can be healed with two months of attentive, sacrificial love. But who would deny that two months, or even two weeks, of loving care could make a real impact on an ailing marriage? Because marriage is such an intense, intimate relationship, anything done for the benefit of the marriage can bring a huge payoff.

Psalm 128 is an example of this principle. The premise of the psalm is that if we will fear God and obey Him by living according to His Word, we will enjoy God's blessing. The writer could have stopped at verse 1, and we would have a valuable piece of biblical insight. But the rest of the psalm contains "for instances," examples of the ways this blessing will be realized. The center of the psalm, the pivot around which all of it turns, is the blessing of a marriage and home in which God is honored and obeyed.

The psalm is written from the perspective of the husband and father who is responsible for setting the pace spiritually and even emotionally in the home. The picture of this man's wife as "a fruitful vine" (v. 3) suggests a woman growing and flourishing as her husband provides the kind of nurturing love that Christ pours out on His church (Eph. 5:25).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Premarital counselors often remind engaged couples that their marriage will impact many people besides themselves

Heavenly Father, many times we weep in sorrow and weep with those who weep. As we turn our thoughts to You and Your promises, turn our sorrow into joy. When we work hard to meet the needs of our families, others and ourselves, please give us good success and rejoicing in the fruit of our labors. We pray that you would build and guard our homes as we pray and trust in You. Fill us with your Spirit so we will walk in Your ways. Amen

Friday, April 15

Psalm 21

¹In your strength the king rejoices, O LORD, and in your help how greatly he exults!

²You have given him his heart's desire, and have not withheld the request of his lips. Selah

³For you meet him with rich blessings; you set a crown of fine gold on his head.

⁴He asked you for life; you gave it to him— length of days forever and ever.

⁵His glory is great through your help; splendor and majesty you bestow on him.

⁶You bestow on him blessings forever; you make him glad with the joy of your presence.

⁷For the king trusts in the LORD, and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be moved.

⁸Your hand will find out all your enemies; your right hand will find out those who hate you.

⁹You will make them like a fiery furnace when you appear. The LORD will swallow them up in his wrath, and fire will consume them.

¹⁰You will destroy their offspring from the earth, and their children from among humankind.

¹¹If they plan evil against you, if they devise mischief, they will not succeed.

¹²For you will put them to flight; you will aim at their faces with your bows.

¹³Be exalted, O LORD, in your strength! We will sing and praise your power.

The popular 1950's television program 'Queen for a Day' took ordinary women with serious needs and made them feel like royalty for twenty-four hours. The winning contestant had her requests granted, a crown placed on her head, and a bouquet of flowers put in her hands. She even got to sit on a throne and be addressed as 'Your majesty.'

We're going to enjoy a little bit of royalty today as we join King David in a hymn of thanksgiving and praise to God. This is called a royal psalm, for obvious reasons. David wrote it as the king of Israel, acknowledging that God had given him his throne and established his kingdom.

We want to consider these verses as an example of what it's like when we are enjoying a spring

season in our walk with Christ. See if this list of benefits describes those times in your life when you have been in extra-close fellowship with Him and you seem to be progressing 'from victory unto victory' spiritually.

David began by praising God for the strength He provides. Among other things, God's strength enabled David to defeat his enemies (vv. 1, 5). We need God's power for victory over our enemy the devil (1 Pet. 5:8). And with each spiritual victory comes the joy of realizing we don't have to be knocked around by sin and temptation.

The king also thanked God for answered prayer (Ps. 21:2). When our faith has a springlike freshness to it, it is usually evident in our prayer lives. This is not to say we can manipulate God to get what we want. David was writing as someone whose delight was in God, so that his prayers reflected God's desires (Ps. 37:4).

David also realized that his blessings did not end on this earth—they last forever (vv. 4, 6). Although the doctrine of eternal life was not fully developed in the Old Testament, David had written prophetically about the resurrection of Christ (Ps. 16:9-11). In our case, eternal life is a clear promise of God's Word.

The list keeps getting better. God's presence was the joy of David's life because he understood God's 'unfailing love' (v. 7). This is God's loyal love, a term you'll run into almost every time you go to the Psalms. His love never gets old, He will never leave you or forsake you (Heb. 13:5).

Most of the time we don't have any problem coming up with a prayer request list.

When was the last time you made a 'thank-you' list? Try it today. Recall the prayers God has answered recently, the needs He has provided for, spiritual victories you have enjoyed and last but not least, the faithful character of our Lord. Then begin thanking God for each item on your list, and your faith will grow stronger.

Heavenly Father, we trust in You, even as we trust in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We trust in Your word, and in Your many demonstrations of strength to help all those in need, especially those who call out to You in prayer. You have continually blessed us in ways innumerable. And most especially, You have promised us the free gift of forgiveness and eternal life through Your only Son, Jesus the Messiah. We find great joy in the opportunity to worship You this day. We sing Your praises for the love and peace that You have poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, Who indwells us and directs our thoughts toward You as we pray. Amen

Saturday, April 16

Psalm 30

¹I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up, and did not let my foes rejoice over me.

²O LORD my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me.

³O LORD, you brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.

⁴Sing praises to the LORD, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name.

⁵For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

⁶As for me, I said in my prosperity, "I shall never be moved."

⁷By your favor, O LORD, you had established me as a strong mountain; you hid your face; I was dismayed.

⁸To you, O LORD, I cried, and to the LORD I made supplication:

⁹"What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?"

¹⁰Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me! O LORD, be my helper!"

¹¹You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,

¹²so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

When the United States imprisoned Japanese-Americans during World War II, some of them coped through music. In fact, swing bands popped up in all the internment camps. "The music got our minds off the war and what was happening to us," said one bandleader. "Because we were so concerned about the music, it took our minds off of the bad things. I'm sure prisoners of all kinds do this kind of thing—find some way to take your mind off of your misery. Otherwise, you'd go crazy."

Making music helped Japanese-Americans endure their difficult and unjust situation. At one level, it transformed grief into happiness, at least for the younger people. At a spiritual level, transforming weeping into dancing is what God is all about, as David testified in today's psalm of thanksgiving. He had wanted to replace the tabernacle with a permanent place of worship, but God had determined it would be David's son who would be given this privilege, not David

(cf. 2 Sam. 7). For someone who loved the Lord as passionately as he did, this must have been a cause of grief. Later, God gave the king an opportunity to buy the land for the future temple as part of his public repentance for numbering the army, and he prepared selected building materials as well (see 1 Chron. 21–22). How thrilled David must have been that God allowed him to do this! His sorrow was turned into joy. His heart was so much in this project that he even composed a psalm for a day he would never see—the day his son Solomon dedicated the finished temple.

What do you want God to change in your life? What do you know that He needs to change? We serve a God who transforms weeping into dancing, so pray in faith about this issue today. There is no need to whine, demand, or doubt. He already knows your need and wants His very best for your life. You can step forward boldly in prayer and believe that He will do whatever is necessary to clothe you with His joy (v. 11).

O God, our Guardian and Guide, we trust in You daily for life and strength to serve You with faith, hope, and love. We will praise You in the morning and throughout the day. We will praise You in the evening, and trust in You day and night. We depend on Your Word and precious promises as we pray in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Sunday, April 17 ~ Palm Sunday

Psalm 118

¹O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!

²Let Israel say, “His steadfast love endures forever.”

³Let the house of Aaron say, “His steadfast love endures forever.”

⁴Let those who fear the LORD say, “His steadfast love endures forever.”

⁵Out of my distress I called on the LORD; the LORD answered me and set me in a broad place.

⁶With the LORD on my side I do not fear. What can mortals do to me?

⁷The LORD is on my side to help me; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.

⁸It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to put confidence in mortals.

⁹It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.

¹⁰All nations surrounded me; in the name of the LORD I cut them off!

¹¹They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side; in the name of the LORD I cut them off!

¹²They surrounded me like bees; they blazed like a fire of thorns; in the name of the LORD I cut them off!

¹³I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the LORD helped me.

¹⁴The LORD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.

¹⁵There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous: "The right hand of the LORD does valiantly;

¹⁶the right hand of the LORD is exalted; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly."

¹⁷I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD.

¹⁸The LORD has punished me severely, but he did not give me over to death.

¹⁹Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD.

²⁰This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it.

²¹I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

²²The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

²³This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

²⁵Save us, we beseech you, O LORD! O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!

²⁶Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. We bless you from the house of the LORD.

²⁷The LORD is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.

²⁸You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.

²⁹O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Perhaps your church has a cornerstone inscribed with the date your church was built and maybe a Scripture verse. You may have been present when this cornerstone was laid and the building dedicated.

Although cornerstones today are largely ceremonial--sometimes even hollowed out for a time capsule--ancient buildings had massive cornerstones to support their weight. Because cornerstones were essential, they became a metaphor for a foundation. Psalm 118 describes the nation Israel as a cornerstone, but one that had been rejected by other nations yet chosen by God (v. 22). God's vindication of the nation produced great joy (vv. 23--24).

Centuries later Jesus used the Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Matt. 21; Mark 12; Luke 20) to apply this psalm to Himself, likening Himself to Israel--rejected by humans but vindicated and exalted by God.

Perhaps while reflecting on this very parable, Peter also wrote about Jesus, the Cornerstone. But since a cornerstone is used in a building, we may wonder what type of building would have Jesus as its cornerstone? Notice how today's passage from Peter begins by calling Jesus the Living Stone (v. 4). What's more, all believers are described as living stones who are precious to God and who are being built into a spiritual house of worship (v. 5).

In addition to Psalm 118, Peter also quoted Isaiah 28:16--today's verse. This beautiful passage probably first had the massive stonework of the temple in mind, alluding to the abiding, unshakable presence of the Lord. The one who trusts in this chosen, precious Cornerstone will never be put to shame (1 Peter 2:6).

Knowing that Jesus is our Cornerstone is a marvelous source of comfort. He is our stability, our firm foundation, the solid rock of our strength.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Psalms and hymns are filled with metaphors for Jesus' foundational nature. For example, in Psalms 18:2 and 31:2, the Lord is a rock and a fortress. In Psalm 61:3, the Lord is a strong tower.

Father God, indeed, this is the day that You have made, a day of rejoicing and rest, and day of celebration and gladness, a day of praise and prayer to You. O God, You are worthy to be praised, and we look forward to that day when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Amen

Monday, April 18 ~ Monday of Holy Week

Psalm 36

¹Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in their hearts; there is no fear of God before their eyes.

²For they flatter themselves in their own eyes that their iniquity cannot be found out and hated.

³The words of their mouths are mischief and deceit; they have ceased to act wisely and do good.

⁴They plot mischief while on their beds; they are set on a way that is not good; they do not reject evil.

⁵Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.

⁶Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your judgments are like the great deep; you save humans and animals alike, O LORD.

⁷How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

⁸They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.

⁹For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.

¹⁰O continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your salvation to the upright of heart!

¹¹Do not let the foot of the arrogant tread on me, or the hand of the wicked drive me away.

¹²There the evildoers lie prostrate; they are thrust down, unable to rise.

There are times in our spiritual experience when human counsel or sympathy, or religious ordinances, fail to comfort or help us. Why does our gracious God permit this? Perhaps it is because we have been living too much without him, and he therefore takes away everything upon which we have been in the habit of depending, that he may drive us to himself. It is a blessed thing to live at the fountain head. While our skin- bottles are full, we are content, like

Hagar and Ishmael, to go into the wilderness; but when those are dry, nothing will serve us but “Thou God seest me.” We are like the prodigal, we love the swine-troughs and forget our Father’s house. Remember, we can make swine-troughs and husks even out of the forms of religion; they are blessed things, but we may put them in God’s place, and then they are of no value. Anything becomes an idol when it keeps us away from God: even the brazen serpent is to be despised as “Nehushtan,” if we worship it instead of God. The prodigal was never safer than when he was driven to his father’s bosom, because he could find sustenance nowhere else. Our Lord favours us with a famine in the land that it may make us seek after himself the more. The best position for a Christian is living wholly and directly on God’s grace—still abiding where he stood at first—“Having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” Let us never for a moment think that our standing is in our sanctification, our mortification, our graces, or our feelings, but know that because Christ offered a full atonement, therefore we are saved; for we are complete in him. Having nothing of our own to trust to, but resting upon the merits of Jesus—his passion and holy life furnish us with the only sure ground of confidence. Beloved, when we are brought to a thirsting condition, we are sure to turn to the fountain of life with eagerness.

O God, You reveal Yourself to us as the Light of Life. In Your only Son, we receive light and life to live as Your faithful servants. Rejoice in our rejoicing over You and the wonderful revelation of Your love and faithfulness to us in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen

Tuesday, April 19 ~ Tuesday of Holy Week

Psalm 72

¹Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king’s son.

²May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice.

³May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness.

⁴May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.

⁵May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.

⁶May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth.

⁷In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

⁸May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

⁹May his foes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust.

¹⁰May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts.

¹¹May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service.

¹²For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper.

¹³He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy.

¹⁴From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight.

¹⁵Long may he live! May gold of Sheba be given to him. May prayer be made for him continually, and blessings invoked for him all day long.

¹⁶May there be abundance of grain in the land; may it wave on the tops of the mountains; may its fruit be like Lebanon; and may people blossom in the cities like the grass of the field.

¹⁷May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun. May all nations be blessed in him; may they pronounce him happy.

¹⁸Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things.

¹⁹Blessed be his glorious name forever; may his glory fill the whole earth. Amen and Amen.

²⁰The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended.

This is a large petition. To intercede for a whole city needs a stretch of faith, and there are times when a prayer for one man is enough to stagger us. But how far-reaching was the psalmist's dying intercession! How comprehensive! How sublime! "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory." It doth not exempt a single country however crushed by the foot of superstition; it doth not exclude a single nation however barbarous. For the cannibal as well as for the civilized, for all climes and races this prayer is uttered: the whole circle of the earth it encompasses, and omits no son of Adam. We must be up and doing for our Master, or we cannot honestly offer such a prayer. The petition is not asked with a sincere heart unless we endeavour, as God shall help us, to extend the kingdom of our Master. Are there not some who neglect both to plead and to labour? Reader, is it your prayer? Turn your eyes to Calvary.

Behold the Lord of Life nailed to a cross, with the thorn-crown about his brow, with bleeding head, and hands, and feet. What! can you look upon this miracle of miracles, the death of the Son of God, without feeling within your bosom a marvellous adoration that language never can express? And when you feel the blood applied to your conscience, and know that he has blotted out your sins, you are not a man unless you start from your knees and cry, "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen." Can you bow before the Crucified in loving homage, and not wish to see your Monarch master of the world? Out on you if you can pretend to love your Prince, and desire not to see him the universal ruler. Your piety is worthless unless it leads you to wish that the same mercy which has been extended to you may bless the whole world. Lord, it is harvest-time, put in thy sickle and reap.

Heavenly Father, we praise You for the many blessings You bestow upon us. We honor You for the faithfulness You show to Your children from generation to generation. We pray that You will cleanse us from all unrighteousness so we can live and work with pure hearts. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit, so we can tell others of Your saving grace and mighty works. Amen

Wednesday, April 20 ~ Wednesday of Holy Week

Psalm 66

¹Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;

²sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise.

³Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.

⁴All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name." Selah

⁵Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.

⁶He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot. There we rejoiced in him,

⁷who rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations— let the rebellious not exalt themselves. Selah

⁸Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard,

⁹who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip.

¹⁰For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried.

¹¹You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs;

¹²you let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.

¹³I will come into your house with burnt offerings; I will pay you my vows,

¹⁴those that my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.

¹⁵I will offer to you burnt offerings of fatlings, with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams; I will make an offering of bulls and goats. Selah

¹⁶Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me.

¹⁷I cried aloud to him, and he was extolled with my tongue.

¹⁸If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

¹⁹But truly God has listened; he has given heed to the words of my prayer.

²⁰Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me.

"Father, cleanse me through Your Word. Let it search out and bring to light all that is of self and the flesh in my faith. Let it cut away every root of self-confidence, that the Vine may find me wholly free to receive His life and spirit. . . . Only You are my hope. Amen."—Andrew Murray, The True Vine

As we consider God in whom there is no darkness, we begin to understand why Isaiah reacted to God's holiness with an overwhelming sense of his own sinfulness (Isa. 6:5). God's moral perfection may make us wonder how He could ever hear our prayers, or even why He would want to.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Understanding God's holiness should deepen our appreciation of the Holy Spirit whom the Father has sent in the name of His Son Jesus (John 14:26). The Spirit of Truth dwelling within us

leads us into God's truth and helps us to discern error and sin within and around us. The indwelling Spirit enables us to yearn for God's holiness and to walk in His ways.

It's not surprising that the Holy Spirit is integrally woven into New Testament passages on prayer. Spend some time today reflecting on the Holy Spirit's role in prayer as revealed in John 14:15–27, 16:5–16, and Romans 8:1–39. What does Jesus promise the Spirit will do? How does the Spirit help us pray? Then ask the Holy Spirit to open your spirit to His leading in holiness and to His prompting in prayer in new and deeper ways.

Lord Jesus, we fully trust in You, the only begotten Son of God. We trust in Your power, Your love, Your mercy, Your willingness to forgive. Help us to follow You daily and live to the praise of Your glory, even as we now pray in Your name. Amen

Thursday, April 21 ~ Maundy Thursday

Psalm 116

¹I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my supplications.

²Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

³The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish.

⁴Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I pray, save my life!"

⁵Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful.

⁶The LORD protects the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me.

⁷Return, O my soul, to your rest, for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.

⁸For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.

⁹I walk before the LORD in the land of the living.

¹⁰I kept my faith, even when I said, "I am greatly afflicted";

¹¹I said in my consternation, "Everyone is a liar."

¹²What shall I return to the LORD for all his bounty to me?

¹³I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD,

¹⁴I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.

¹⁵Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful ones.

¹⁶O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving girl. You have loosed my bonds.

¹⁷I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the LORD.

¹⁸I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people,

¹⁹in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!

Long gone are the days when people didn't lock their doors at night. Now we not only lock them, we deadbolt them. Home security companies install cameras, motion detectors, and alarms programmed to your personal code or password. We buy dogs, join neighborhood watch programs, and install safes in our bedroom closets. We want safety and security--to go to sleep at night with peace of mind.

As today's readings point out, though, a truly peaceful night's sleep can come only through faith. Rest flows from trust in the Lord, and this rest includes physical rest.

As we see in today's first reading, we can find rest in the character of God. He is gracious, righteous, and compassionate. He protects, saves, and delivers those who look to Him in "simplehearted" faith. What are the results of His actions in our lives? We can walk righteously, we can rejoice in Him, and our souls can rest in untroubled confidence in His love and power. We need not be afraid of anything or anybody, for our Father is watching out for us! Think of an impenetrable shield, a sheep lying down in green pastures, and the peace of Christ standing guard over our hearts (Ps. 3:3-5; 23:2; Phil. 4:7). No wonder David exclaimed, "My soul finds rest in God alone" (Ps. 62:1).

Furthermore, rest is one of the fruits or rewards of wisdom, as we see in our second reading. "Sound judgment and discernment" are the path of life, leading to righteousness, peace, and security, much as we saw in Psalm 116. And again we have the idea that God's way is the way of rest, so much so that the wise person's sleep will be "sweet"--refreshing, pleasurable, and even delicious (Prov. 3:24). This is one of the many blessings of wisdom, which is also said to watch over us when we're sleeping (Prov. 6:22).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Have you been guilty of modern gnosticism? Gnosticism is an ancient heresy that devalues material reality and tries to divide soul from body. The truth is that God created material reality and gave us bodies as a gift--in fact, we'll have bodies for all eternity!

Heavenly Father, life, health, and daily strength come from You. Thank You for caring for our physical needs as well as our spiritual needs. Help us show our appreciation to You by what we say and do in Your presence, and in the presence of others. Help us remain faithful in troubling times, and hear our prayers in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Friday, April 22 ~ Good Friday

Psalm 79

¹O God, the nations have come into your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple; they have laid Jerusalem in ruins.

²They have given the bodies of your servants to the birds of the air for food, the flesh of your faithful to the wild animals of the earth.

³They have poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them.

⁴We have become a taunt to our neighbors, mocked and derided by those around us.

⁵How long, O LORD? Will you be angry forever? Will your jealous wrath burn like fire?

⁶Pour out your anger on the nations that do not know you, and on the kingdoms that do not call on your name.

⁷For they have devoured Jacob and laid waste his habitation.

⁸Do not remember against us the iniquities of our ancestors; let your compassion come speedily to meet us, for we are brought very low.

⁹Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and forgive our sins, for your name's sake.

¹⁰Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of your servants be known among the nations before our eyes.

¹¹Let the groans of the prisoners come before you; according to your great power preserve those doomed to die.

¹²Return sevenfold into the bosom of our neighbors the taunts with which they taunted you, O Lord!

¹³Then we your people, the flock of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise.

Washington Irving observed the following about tears: “There is sacredness in tears. . . . They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition, and of unspeakable love.”

The author of today’s psalm would have agreed. His “overwhelming grief” is obvious in this lament psalm poetically grieving the destruction of Jerusalem (vv. 1–4). Speaking for the nation, the psalm petitions the Lord God to remember His people and to avenge their enemies (vv. 5–7)--a plea based on God’s mercy and forgiveness (v. 8). The honor of God’s holy name motivates further appeals for divine action (vv. 9–12). Finally, the people collectively vow to praise God (v. 13).

Psalm 79 provides a good introduction to Lamentations, which comprises five lament poems. The Hebrew name of this book is “Alas!”--a heart-rending indication of the consequences of Judah’s sin. Second Kings 24–25 and Jeremiah 52 give the facts of the siege and exile of Jerusalem; Lamentations gives the emotions.

Tradition says that Jeremiah wrote these five poems in a cave west of Jerusalem while Nebuchadnezzar marched the people into exile. These poems are acrostic, meaning each line (or group of lines in chapter 3) of the poem begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This creative feature probably intended to stress the complete--or A to Z--nature of the nation’s sin and to set boundaries on the nation’s grieving.

The first four chapters of Lamentations portray Jerusalem from different voices: a princess forced into harsh labor with no comfort (chapter 1); the object of God’s wrath (chapter 2); the solitary cry of an individual (chapter 3); and the former treasures of the city (chapter 4). In chapter 5, the exiles cry out.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

One Bible scholar commented that Lamentations was written “to encourage completeness in the expression of grief, the confession of sin, and the instilling of hope.”

O God, sometimes we feel surrounded by our enemies. Sometimes those we have elected to lead us have turned from You and have brought us disgrace. Our enemies mock You, the God we

serve, and they ridicule us for trusting in You as King of the universe. Sometimes we also feel as though we will always lose the battles against sin and temptation within us. Grant us the victories we need as we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen

Saturday, April 23 ~ Holy Saturday

Psalm 46

¹God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

³though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. Selah

⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.

⁵God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns.

⁶The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.

⁷The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah

⁸Come, behold the works of the LORD; see what desolations he has brought on the earth.

⁹He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.

¹⁰“Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.”

¹¹The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah

Lord, I know not what I ought to ask of thee . . . I simply present myself before thee, I open my heart to thee. . . . I am silent; I offer myself in sacrifice; I yield myself to thee; I would have no other desire than to accomplish thy Will. Teach me to pray. Pray thyself in me. Amen.—François Fénelon

Ole Hallesby shares a significant incident in his book, *Prayer*. Although his young son knew that he was not supposed to disturb his father during work hours, the boy nevertheless came into his father’s office one day and said, “Papa, dear, I will sit still all the time if you will only let me

be here with you!”

For many of us, however, simply wanting to “sit still” with the Lord may not be our daily experience. We are more comfortable doing things for God and speaking to Him than simply listening to Him.

Sometimes we aren’t even sure how to listen to God. The Lord spoke to Elijah in “a gentle whisper” (v. 12), but we may prefer a great shout! Our culture suggests that “louder is better” and more important.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We can hear the Lord in a variety of ways—directly through the ministry of the Holy Spirit or indirectly through other people or circumstances. Most often, however, we hear Him in conjunction with His Word, either through the words in the Bible itself or in prayer as we seek to understand His Word.

Although the busyness of our lives and our own fears of silence may make us feel uncomfortable to simply come before the Lord in silence, great blessing comes when we do. Find some time today, when you know you won’t be interrupted, to come quietly before the Lord, silently reading through Psalm 46.

Slowly read the psalm, waiting quietly after each line to take in what the Lord has said to you from His Word. Pause and reflect on His truth. Don’t worry if you feel silly or if you don’t “hear” anything. In some ways, being silent before the Lord is like a human relationship: the better we know someone, the more comfortable we feel being silent with that person. Our ability to sit silently before Him increases as our relationship with Him deepens.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for creating us in Your image. We thank You for the ability to reason, make decisions, and enjoy the beautiful world You created. We thank You for meaningful relationships with You and others, made possible through Jesus Christ our Lord. We thank You for Your Spirit, Who indwells us and guides us daily. We give thanks for the gift of eternal life, even as we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen

Sunday, April 24 ~ Resurrection of the Lord

Psalm 93

¹The LORD is king, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed, he is girded with strength. He has established the world; it shall never be moved;

²your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting.

³The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their roaring.

⁴More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters, more majestic than the waves of the sea, majestic on high is the LORD!

⁵Your decrees are very sure; holiness befits your house, O LORD, forevermore.

Christ is Everlasting. Of him we may sing with David, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.” Rejoice, believer, in Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and for ever. Jesus always was. The Babe born in Bethlehem was united to the Word, which was in the beginning, by whom all things were made. The title by which Christ revealed himself to John in Patmos was, “Him which is, and which was, and which is to come.” If he were not God from everlasting, we could not so devoutly love him; we could not feel that he had any share in the eternal love which is the fountain of all covenant blessings; but since he was from all eternity with the Father, we trace the stream of divine love to himself equally with his Father and the blessed Spirit. As our Lord always was, so also he is for evermore. Jesus is not dead; “He ever liveth to make intercession for us.” Resort to him in all your times of need, for he is waiting to bless you still. Moreover, Jesus our Lord ever shall be. If God should spare your life to fulfill your full day of threescore years and ten, you will find that his cleansing fountain is still opened, and his precious blood has not lost its power; you shall find that the Priest who filled the healing fount with his own blood, lives to purge you from all iniquity. When only your last battle remains to be fought, you shall find that the hand of your conquering Captain has not grown feeble—the living Saviour shall cheer the dying saint. When you enter heaven you shall find him there bearing the dew of his youth; and through eternity the Lord Jesus shall still remain the perennial spring of joy, and life, and glory to his people. Living waters may you draw from this sacred well! Jesus always was, he always is, he always shall be. He is eternal in all his attributes, in all his offices, in all his might, and willingness to bless, comfort, guard, and crown his chosen people.

O God, our Father, we honor and worship You as the true King over all nations on Earth and over worlds throughout the universe. You made all that exists, and all that exists owes their reality and purpose to You. And yet, many have rebelled against You and Your holy rule over all. From time to time, we too have disregarded Your laws, we too have sinned, we too have fallen into temptation and have brought disgrace to You, our King. Forgive us for our sins, cleanse us from all unrighteousness, empower us to serve You with a heart of love for You and others. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit and hear us now as we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and only Savior. Amen

- ❖ All Scripture passages taken from the New International Version of the Bible.
- ❖ All meditations/reflections taken from C.H. Spurgeon’s “Devotions on Psalms” or Moody Bible Institute’s “Today in the Word”.
- ❖ Prayers are taken from “A Psalm and A Prayer” offered by Stonegate Presbyterian Church of Edmond, Oklahoma.