

Saturday, August 29

Psalm 20 *May the LORD answer you in time of trouble. May the name of Jacob's God be your tower of strength.* (v.1)

Psalm 20 is a lovely prayer. Though originally intended as a prayer of blessing for David, its sentiments reveal a deep confidence in God's steadfast love. The psalmist has no doubt that God cares for individuals, loves them, and desires nothing but good for them. Jacob's God answers our prayers, sends us help in time of trouble and gives us support. He can grant us our heart's desire. He is so different from other gods that those who trust in Him boast in His name.

The great and awesome mystery at the heart of God's dealing with us is that He loves you and me as individuals. He hears your prayer and my prayer. He knows your heart and my heart. He calls us each by name.

As I write these words, I am struck by how incredible they must seem to someone who, even if she or he might actually acknowledge there is a God, believes God is so awesome and beyond comprehension that He is indifferent to such puny creatures as we. But He isn't indifferent, He is our tower of strength. "Let us therefore boldly approach the throne of grace, in order that we may receive mercy and find grace to give us timely help" (Hebrews 4:16).

Job 9:1, 10:1-9, 16-22; Psalm 21; Acts 11:1-18; John 8:12-20

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Sunday, August 23

Mark 6:1-6a *And he was unable to do any miracle there, except that he put his hands on a few sick people and healed them; and he was astonished at their lack of faith.* (vv.5-6 NIV)

She offered very few reasons for her judgment. She emphatically told anyone willing to listen that the visiting priest's sermon was not "anointed." She focused on his delivery (monotonous) and content (he failed to incorporate themes she thought the scriptural text demanded). Others in the congregation had a different opinion. They said the sermon spoke clearly and powerfully to them. Granted, the priest's delivery left something to be desired, but they thought they heard the word of God clearly spoken.

Too often, we miss hearing God's word because we allow ourselves to be distracted by someone's appearance, or background, or tone of voice, or membership in a certain group, or, as in the case of the people from Jesus' hometown, family. "Isn't he a carpenter? Don't we know his family? Where did he get his wisdom? How can he perform miracles?" If we attend to anything and everything but the message, we will not allow Jesus to do any miracle in us because of our lack of faith.

Sermon time gives us the opportunity to pray for the preacher and to be attentive to the special message God has for us in the words spoken.

Job 4:1-6, 12-21; Psalms 146, 147; Revelation 4:1-11

Monday, August 24

John 6:52-59 *"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."* (v.54)

Jesus' words, the evangelist tells us, "led to a fierce dispute among the Jews. 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' they protested" (John 6:52). Among Christian churches, we have different versions of the substance of, and the manner of approaching, the Lord's Table, although the Body and Blood of Jesus remain essential to the Christian faith.

At the Last Supper, Jesus gave his apostles and all those who profess him as their Lord and Savior a precious gift: his Body and Blood. And he commanded Christians to "do this in memory of me."

In the sacrament of Holy Communion, we remember Jesus' passion, death, resurrection, and ascension, are filled with grace and reminded of the pledge of future glory given us by his saving work.

Communion is the spiritual food which strengthens our union with Christ and one another. It brings eternal life, because it is a sharing in the

Body and Blood of Christ. It is the perfect sacrament of God's self-giving. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

Job 4:1; 5:1-11, 17-21, 26-27; Psalms 1, 2, 3; Acts 9:19b-31

Tuesday, August 25

Job 6:1-4, 8-15, 21 *"Have I the strength to go on waiting? What end have I to expect, that I should be patient? Is my strength the strength of stone, or is my flesh made of bronze? Oh how shall I find help within myself now that success has been put beyond my reach?"* (vv.11-13)

In response to Eliphaz the Temanite's pious utterances, Job complains about his treatment at God's hands. "If only the grounds for my resentment might be weighed, and my misfortunes placed with them on the scales!" But Job understands that against the awesome sovereignty of God, he has no weapon, no defense.

There are times in my life when I wonder whether I have the strength to go on waiting. I ask where all this will end. I am impatient with God and His ways, frustrated by uncertainty and personal weakness, and desperately aware that I can find no help within myself. Like Job, I have no defense against the mystery of God's hidden ways and His providence.

At those times, my inability to control all that happens to me and to save myself falls away and I am confronted with trusting Him "who is my friend and not a stranger." I have neither strength of stone nor flesh of bronze and can find no help within myself. But "I am able to face anything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

Psalms 5, 6; Acts 9:32-43; John 6:60-71

Wednesday, August 26

Job 6:1, 7:1-21 *"So months of futility are my portion, troubled nights are my lot. When I lie down, I think, 'When will it be day, that I may rise?' But the night drags on, and I do nothing but toss till dawn."* (vv.3-4)

The past several months have been a difficult time for me. Because I have been unemployed, I have been concerned about my family's financial security and my own future. In addition, my wife and I have gone through the wrenching experience of our daughter's troubled adolescence.

We have known "months of futility" and "troubled nights" when the hours dragged on. Sometimes, we wake up at two or three o'clock in the morning worrying about one seemingly insurmountable problem or another.

At those moments, I ask Jesus to remind me of his words: "Do not be anxious about tomorrow; tomorrow will look after itself. Each day has troubles enough of its own" (Matthew 6:34). And I pray for the grace of trusting him from whose love "nothing in all creation can separate us" (Romans 8:39). He is the light in our darkness, the dawning at the end of night, the one who promises refreshment and comfort to the heavily burdened.

Psalms 119:1-24; Acts 10:1-16; John 7:1-13

Thursday, August 27

Acts 10:17-33 *Peter said to them, "I need not tell you that a Jew is forbidden by his religion to visit or associate with anyone of another race. Yet God has shown me clearly that I must not call anyone profane or unclean."* (v.28)

Peter received an important revelation in the vision he had on his journey to the house of Cornelius, the centurion of the Italian Cohort. A heavenly voice told Peter he was not to call profane what God counts clean.

One frequently hears that certain Christian churches aren't inclusive enough. There is only one principle of inclusion in the church: We have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. No one of us can claim a special relationship with God by virtue of personal righteousness, denominational affiliation, ethnic identity, theological sophistication, or intensity of devotion. God counts clean those who have been justified through faith.

Christian churches should include all who acknowledge and repent of their sinfulness and are willing to receive the grace of redemption brought to them by Jesus. If they have other criteria for inclusion, they risk contradicting the God who has no favorites.

Job 8:1-10, 20-22; Psalm 18:1-20; John 7:14-36

Friday, August 28

John 7:37-52 *On the last and greatest day of the festival Jesus stood and declared, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says, 'Streams of living water shall flow from within him.'"* (vv.37-38)

I live in a dry land, part of what is sometimes referred to as the Great American Desert. This spring, we had considerably more rain and snow than usual. The effect of so much water on lawns and gardens was stunning. The abundance of red, yellow, purple, and orange tulips provided a dramatic contrast with the surrounding lush green lawn. The apple and peach trees in our back yard exploded in delicate blooms. My wife and I have never seen such colorful irises. This year, flowers, trees and lawn became vivid metaphors of the effects of streams of living water.

Jesus invites anyone who is thirsty to come and drink. He is living water. But we must first recognize that we are thirsty. It's easy to ignore dehydration until it begins to have certain unpleasant effects on the body. If we are aware of how easily we become dehydrated, we can take steps to satisfy our thirst. The psalmist thirsted for "God, the living God." Jesus offers living water which transforms our deserts into gardens of God's love and glory.

Job 9:1-15, 32-35; Psalms 16, 17; Acts 10:34-48