

FEBRUARY 2021 DEVOTIONS

Sunday, February 7, 2021

***Praise the Lord!* - Psalm 147:1-11, 20 (NRSV)**

Praise the Lord!

How good it is to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting. The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds. He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names. Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure. The Lord lifts up the downtrodden; he casts the wicked to the ground. Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre. He covers the heavens with clouds, prepares rain for the earth, makes grass grow on the hills. He gives to the animals their food, and to the young ravens when they cry. His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner; but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his ordinances.

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Take a moment to sit and appreciate the beauty of Creation - the animals, the plants...sun during the day, the moon at night.....the land, the oceans...the complexity of it all, yet the simplicity as well. God is the source and sustainer of it all! How can we not be in awe? How can we not find pleasure? How can we not sing praise?

Abram experienced a vision and lifted his eyes toward the heavens and was instructed by God to count the stars. Abram's deepest longing would be fulfilled. He not only would become the father of Isaac, but descendants would follow, greater than the number of stars in the sky. Abram was given hope, and it was fulfilled by God.

The world is full of beauty, mysteries too numerable to really count, but we can take (should, and must) take time to delight in God's Creation, and our Creator's peace, faithfulness and steadfast love. Praise the Lord!

Questions to Ponder

- Have I taken time today to praise God, to sit in awe of Creation?
- What particular beauty or mystery of Creation is speaking to you right now?

Prayer

God of all. We offer our praise for Creation, for its beauty and mystery, for the all that sustains life, for descendants who preceded us, who are present now, and will follow in the future. Amen.

Sunday, February 14, 2021

The Transfiguration - Mark 9:2-9 (NRSV)

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

The disciples are confused and frightened. Jesus is transfigured before them. Peter is attempting to provide meaning to what is happening. Both Elijah and Moses appear. God then speaks from the cloud announcing that not only is Jesus the Christ. He is also God's own beloved son, imploring them to *Listen to him!*

God is inviting the disciples, and all of us, to take up our own cross and follow Jesus. Taking up our cross might suggest suffering as a spiritual good or inherently saving or redemptive, but that is not the true meaning. Jesus did not die because his suffering would purge sin or evil from the world. He died because evil powers sought to destroy his witness to nonviolent love, justice and truth. Jesus' passion revealed a love that is saving and redemptive.

When Jesus stood on the mountain, dazzling in the light of God, the heavenly mystery was revealed. Jesus is the Christ, the beloved son of God, resurrected following his death on the cross.

Questions to Ponder

- Have I taken up my cross and followed Jesus?
- Do I reflect a love that is saving and redemptive?

Prayer

Holy God. Jesus is both the Christ, and your beloved son. Lead us and guide us to follow his way. Amen.

February 17, 2021 - Ash Wednesday

Repent - Psalm 51:1-17 (NRSV)

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against 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. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Who among us doesn't find ourselves at times coming before God to confess that we've messed up. Perhaps we say or do something that we shouldn't, or neglect to say or do something that we should. We confess our sin(s), and promise to repent, turning toward the Light that will point us toward what is true and what is right.

Psalm 51 is a prayer for inward and spiritual renewal. Lent calls us to examine ourselves, to reflect and contemplate our lives. This holy season reminds us that we are fallible. We sometimes sin and need to come before God to confess. And it doesn't stop there. We need to repent, reorient ourselves away from neglectful behaviors in speech and action. It's not punishment, rather a realization that we are not God, an understanding that the sacrifice acceptable to God is *a broken spirit and a contrite heart*. Here we repent.

Question to Ponder

- What is within my heart and mind that I need to confess to God?

Prayer

Holy God. You alone can provide unlimited love and grace. You alone can renew my spirit. Amen.

Sunday, February 21, 2021

Never to be Forgotten - Genesis 9:8-17 (NRSV)

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

This is the story of the covenant following the flood made through Noah and all of Creation with the central message of love and hope. God is grieving humanity's hard heartedness. God turns from punishment to forgiveness knowing that humans and all of Creation may always resist God. The rainbow symbolizes that our Creator will never again destroy Creation with a flood.

The story of this covenant was recorded during a time of exile for the Israelites from their homeland, a time of chaos. So what might this scripture be saying to us right now? While we may not be exiled from our homeland, we can certainly appreciate the meaning of living in somewhat chaotic times right now. Perhaps we can cling to the sign of the bow as a reminder that even within the worst of chaos, God will not forget us. God is and will continue to be present in the midst.

Read the scripture again, and sit with it for awhile. What else might it be saying to you, to humankind and all of Creation?

Questions to Ponder

- What do I cling to when life is chaotic?
- How might I share the sign of the bow and God's covenant to encourage others who may need something to cling to?

Prayer

Holy God. We cling to you knowing you are present, knowing that you listen, knowing we will find love and hope. Amen.

Sunday, February 28, 2021

Our Shared Destiny - Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16. (NRSV)

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

Abram and Sarai were well into their nineties and it's likely the pace of their lives had slowed down. Perhaps they were more reflective and contemplative. Perhaps more than those who are younger, aware of mistakes and how others might have been harmed by their actions over their lifetime. I think during our Lenten journey, we (at any age) are called to slow down, reflect and contemplate our lives.

God enters in, and has plans that will forever change their lives and the future of Israel. Everyone in this story receives a new name and a new covenant is made. God is given the name *God Almighty (El Shaddai)*. This is the God of Genesis who created the heavens and the earth. Abram and Sarai are blessed with the names, Abraham and Sarah, and their destiny is guaranteed. What seemed impossible for them becomes possible. They will be the ancestors of many nations, heirs greater than the number of stars in the sky.

This scripture reminds us that the covenant continues to provide us with hope, an identity, and place within Creation. This eternal promise is our destiny. During Lent, as we reflect and contemplate our lives, we too can find hope in our Creator.

Questions to Ponder

- Am I taking the time right now to slow down, reflect and contemplate?
- How am I living out my place with Creation?

Prayer

Holy God. You call us by name to our destiny and shared hope with all of Creation. Amen.

