

## OCTOBER 2021 DEVOTIONS

Sunday, October 3, 2021

### **Lamentations 3:19-26 (NRSV) - God's Goodness and Mercy**

*The thought of my affliction and my homelessness  
is wormwood and gall!*

*My soul continually thinks of it  
and is bowed down within me.*

*But this I call to mind,  
and therefore I have hope:*

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,  
his mercies never come to an end;*

*they are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.*

*"The Lord is my portion," says my soul,  
"therefore I will hope in him."*

*The Lord is good to those who wait for him,  
to the soul that seeks him.*

*It is good that one should wait quietly  
for the salvation of the Lord.*

In this Scripture we hear a confident trust in God within the midst of great misery. Jerusalem has been destroyed, humiliated by its enemies, yet the psalmist looks toward to the future with firm hope.

Let's consider three questions to help us gain an understanding of the ability to have complete trust and hope found in this Scripture...

*How does God act in the world? (Providence)* This Scripture reminds us to reconsider a tendency to say that God causes good and bad to happen in the world, rather than humans taking the role of making decisions that have resulted in good and bad events that have occurred throughout history. Does God cause the suffering in the world, or is suffering the result of bad decisions made by humanity?

*If God is good and powerful, why is there suffering and evil? (Theodicy)*  
Some believe that evil is a punishment of the wicked and misfortune of the good, but can we say the event of the Holocaust punished wicked people? In this Scripture, we learn that Jerusalem and its people were destroyed. Perhaps God's role is not to control all historical events, rather God's role is to be merciful, to draw us toward redemption?

*What is the nature of our hope? (Eschatology)* In historical context, we hear the future restoration of Jerusalem and its people. What can we - 21st century people, hear? Let's consider how we live as a people. Do we understand that God will never abandon us? Do we understand that God does not desire suffering, that God's mercy endures? Can we embrace that God will always have the final word? Can we have faith that there is always hope, and that salvation is real.

This can be a confusing Scripture. It challenges us to consider the nature of God, how he acts within our lives, and the world. As you consider the meaning of this text, be sure to remember God's prevailing goodness and mercy.

### **Prayer**

Holy God, within your infinite goodness and mercy, we find hope and salvation. Help us to follow your lead to make good decisions to avoid suffering in the lives of your children and all of Creation. Amen.

**Sunday, October 10, 2021**

**Psalm 66:1-12 (NRSV) - New Life**

*Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;*

*2 sing the glory of his name;*

*give to him glorious praise.*

*3 Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!*

*Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.*

*4 All the earth worships you;*

*they sing praises to you,*

*sing praises to your name."Selah*

*5 Come and see what God has done:*

*he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.*

*6 He turned the sea into dry land;*

*they passed through the river on foot.*

*There we rejoiced in him,*

*7 who rules by his might forever,*

*whose eyes keep watch on the nations—*

*let the rebellious not exalt themselves.*

*8 Bless our God, O peoples,*

*let the sound of his praise be heard,*

*9 who has kept us among the living,*

*and has not let our feet slip.*

*10 For you, O God, have tested us;*

*you have tried us as silver is tried.*

*11 You brought us into the net;*

*you laid burdens on our backs;*

*12 you let people ride over our heads;*

*we went through fire and through water;*

*yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.*

Three theological themes are prominent in Psalm 66 - *resurrection, providence, and divine sovereignty*. Let's take a few moments to reflect upon those...

*Resurrection* Verses 6 and 9-12 describes the passage from death to life - the exodus, crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land. God brought and continues to bring covenant people from death to life, a

release from slavery to freedom. Celebrating the exodus might help us to more fully appreciate the meaning of resurrection. Jesus was raised from the dead, and through him, we too can pass from death into life, and be released to freedom.

*Providence* God cares for us through the darkest times of our lives toward the promise of new life as in the past, as well as, now and the future. God's goodness is central to this text, and present at all times. God's mercy is everlasting, and love prevails.

*Divine Sovereignty* We can *Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth (v. 1)* because of God's saving work. The exodus was not only for Israel. The liberation of Israel was for all nations making God's name known throughout the world. God is sovereign and worthy of praise.

### **Questions to Ponder**

- What does resurrection mean to you? Are there times when you have experienced a passing from death to life - individually, as a group?

### **Prayer**

Merciful God we offer praise to you, and for the gift of Jesus who's resurrection shows us the way to transition from death into new life. Amen.

**Sunday, October 17, 2021**

**Psalm 119:97-104 (NRSV) - *Relating to the Law***

*Oh, how I love your law!*

*It is my meditation all day long.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Law was not simply a code of rules to be followed. As revealed within this text, it should be loved, meditated upon, and tasted. The instructions for living were provided by God within a covenantal relationship with humankind. The Law was not imposed, it was given.

How should Christians relate to the Law? Martin Luther believed the Law may help us to restrain from evil behaviors, help maintain social order, and provide the basis for criminal acts. As we study the Law, we may acknowledge our inability to keep it, so we look to Christ where we seek God's grace.

Some theologians claim that rather than relying than on self, we rely on God to teach us how to live faithfully. The Scotts Confession written in 1560, "*as God the Father beholds us in the body of his Son Christ Jesus, he accepts our imperfect obedience as if we were perfect, and covers our works, which are defiled with many stains, with the righteousness of his Son.*" Christ fulfills the Law, we are seen as faithful to the Law because of his faithfulness.

**Questions to Ponder**

Take a moment to reread and consider the passage from the Scotts Confession. Does this speak to you? How do you relate to the Law?

**Prayer**

Holy God, your love and grace have spoken to us from the beginning. Your desire for us to live faithfully has been communicated and modeled for us through Christ and throughout the ages, and we give thanks. Amen.

**Sunday, October 24, 2021**

**Psalm 65 (NRSV) - *Forgiver, Deliverer, Provider***

*Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion; and to you shall vows be performed, O you who answer prayer!*

*To you all flesh shall come.*

*When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us, you forgive our transgressions.*

*Happy are those whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts.*

*We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple.*

*By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.*

*By your strength you established the mountains; you are girded with might.*

*You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples.*

*Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.*

*You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it;*

*the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it.*

*You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.*

*You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness.*

*The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,*

*the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.*

Psalm 65 is a community song of thanksgiving and within this text, we can identify three roles for God within all that has been and will be created. The text begins with the community's praise for God's enduring mercy and kindness. We gather together for worship not because it's a personal right. We gather because we are accepted by God despite our failures.

God our *Forgiver*, knowing that during times of crises, sins and wrongdoings are forgiven. As *Deliverer*, God gives us salvation beyond forgiveness. This salvation, beyond the personal - *the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas*.

God's hand as *Provider* extends beyond the original act of creation into our present world. God will remain present supporting all that God has created, and as the psalm concludes, we can be joyous knowing that God is present.

### **Questions to Ponder**

- When gathering in worship, do I give thanks for God's presence in the salvation and deliverance not only personally, but also for our church community?

### **Prayer**

Holy God we come to you not only as individuals, but also as community, praying that your forgiveness for our failures will lead to our salvation.  
Amen.

**Sunday, October 31, 2021**

**Psalm 149 (NRSV) - *Praise and Justice***

*Praise the Lord!*

*Sing to the Lord a new song,*

*his praise in the assembly of the faithful.*

*Let Israel be glad in its Maker;*

*let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.*

*Let them praise his name with dancing,*

*making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.*

*For the Lord takes pleasure in his people;*

*he adorns the humble with victory.*

*Let the faithful exult in glory;*

*let them sing for joy on their couches.*

*Let the high praises of God be in their throats*

*and two-edged swords in their hands,*

*to execute vengeance on the nations*

*and punishment on the peoples,*

*to bind their kings with fetters*

*and their nobles with chains of iron,*

*to execute on them the judgment decreed.*

*This is glory for all his faithful ones.*

*Praise the Lord!*

Tomorrow we celebrate All Saints Day remembering the faithful who have gone before. We talk of the great cloud of witnesses now dwelling elsewhere in a greater light. In church we'll remember those who have passed in the last year, and although the loss is sad, their memory can fill us with joy. Sometimes we leave with a different understanding of life and death.

Psalm 149 invites us to consider a new understanding as well. This is a psalm of praise for God's mighty acts of power culminating in victory for Israel. Initially the imagery is music, dancing, and joy, and then there's a sudden shift. The language and imagery are troubling. It's chaotic, vengeful, violent, and murderous. Scholars believe the *two-edged sword* refers to the swift justice of God's word for God's chosen people. It is a victory that is certain and already decreed in the heavenly records.

Psalm 149 places praise and justice side-to-side, and without doing so, neither will be complete. Although the later imagery of the *two-edged sword* reminds us that justice is not always achieved in peaceful ways. However, whenever justice is achieved, joy should follow.

### **Questions to Ponder**

- Perhaps the overriding question to consider is whether revenge, violence, and murderous acts are sometimes inevitable to achieve justice?

### **Prayer**

Holy God. Scripture can sometimes be difficult to fully comprehend. Revenge and violent images are troubling, and so we turn to you to help discernment these difficult texts.