

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT
March 10, 2024

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22
Give Thanks to the Lord

Grace to you and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

For our Wednesday Lenten services we have been blessed with those who are offering reflections on their favorite psalms. So far we have been comforted by Psalm 46 that opens with the words: *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.* From Psalm 139 we learned about the all-encompassing presence of God in our daily lives. And this past Wednesday our attention turned to Psalm 32 and the joy of being forgiven.

Martin Luther called the *Book of Psalms* a little Bible. For those who did not have the time to read the entire Bible, he believed the psalms offered a good summary of what a healthy relationship with God would look like. The psalms teach us how to communicate with God. They capture all the highs and lows of a life of faith. We can sing with joy from the top of mountains or cry out with pain at the injustices of this world. We can weep with those who suffer or we can join hands with all those who have made it through their suffering and now offer their thanks and praise to our awesome God.

Psalm 107 is the perfect psalm for today because in just two weeks we start Holy Week. Although we only heard a portion of the psalm this morning, it would be worth our time to consider the entire chapter. If we were to hear it chanted in Hebrew, the melody would rise up like incense as this psalm speaks beautifully about the steadfast love of God (a love that never gives up on us) (a love that accepts us without reservation).

It is helpful to read the psalm meditatively and prayerfully. The ones who sing this song are the redeemed and within these verses they tell us four different stories about what happened to them and how God intervened. It is easy to put ourselves into each of these scenarios.

Some tell of the time they wandered in desert places where they grew faint from hunger and thirst. It reminds us of the times when we are running on empty and do not know how to replenish our resources. Some speak of the time they rebelled against God and sat in darkness and in gloom. We, too, can sometimes feel the weight of our sins.

Still others confronted the terrible consequences of their sin and it made them physically ill. Once more we face the gravity of some of the choices we make in life. And the fourth and final story tells of those who found themselves in the middle of a terrible storm. They were overcome with fear as the winds raged and the waves washed over them and tossed them about. We do not need to sit in a boat to know what it is like to have our world turned upside down.

I found it easy to put myself in these stories and it made me want to learn more! Remember that this is a song that speaks of the steadfast love of God (a love that never gives up on us) (a love that accepts us without reservation). When we are hungry and thirsty, rebelling against God, living out the consequences of our sin, or sitting in a storm we, too, can do what the psalmist does next. We can cry out to God and we, too, can hear the assurance that God will deliver us from our troubles.

In Psalm 107 this is the message that gets repeated. The people cried to the Lord in their distress and he delivered them. They cried to the Lord and he saved them. They cried to the Lord and he brought them out from their darkness. He turned a desert into pools of water where the thirsty could drink from the springs. God led the hungry on a path that led them to a place that had food. God broke the bonds of those imprisoned. God delivered those steeped in sin. God made the storm be still.

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.
His steadfast love endures forever.
Let the redeemed of the Lord say it is so!

I would think that we all have our own stories to share that would fit any one of these categories if not all of them. No matter what we are facing in life (no matter what trouble we have gotten ourselves into) God responds to our cries for help with his grace.

God responds even when our crisis is caused by our own foolish rebellion. It is the most remarkable act of God that lies at the heart of the Good News.

In Psalm 107, God was the One who delivered the people from their distress. It is no coincidence that these same four stories are played out later in each of the four gospels. Remember that it was Jesus, the Son of God, who fed 5,000 people in a deserted place. It was Jesus who freed those who were bound by demons. It was Jesus who healed the sick and forgave the sinners. It was Jesus who quieted the storms.

God in Christ assures us today that God's grace is not just reserved for good people who have led good lives and only mess up every now and then. We find comfort knowing that God responds to those of us who have royally missed the mark which is how sin is defined in the Bible.

Our lesson from Ephesians 2 says it well: *We were dead in our sins and transgressions but God, who is rich in mercy (out of his great love for us) made us alive with Christ. This is not our own doing. It is the gift of God. This is not the result of our works. For we are what God has made us to be, created in Christ Jesus.*

We are recipients of a remarkable gift from God.

As I meditated some more on this psalm, I thought about those who have experienced some serious times of distress in their lives and are now on the other side. We are the hungry and thirsty who have been fed. We are the ones bound by our sin who have been liberated. We are the ones deserving of death yet have been given the promise of eternal life. We are the fearful who have seen the storm waters subside and it has given us hope.

If we follow the pattern of the psalm then what comes next is sharing our stories and expressing our thanks to God. It is all too easy to forget what God has done and simply move on with our lives. We need this call to offer prayers of thanksgiving to God and to express our gratitude and joy.

But this week my thoughts also went to those who are in the midst of their distress and troubles and are crying out to God right now.

I entrust Psalm 107 to all those who are broken or in bondage or discouraged or whose lives have been turned upside down. God has a promise embedded in this psalm that will give you hope. And God has called this community of faith to be the hands and feet of God for you. We will be the voice of God in your broken world.

Psalm 107 helps us understand that God will never give up on any of us. God will accept us without reservation. God will hold onto us and redeem us. It is the one relationship in our lives that we cannot mess up. God created it, God maintains it, and God will bring it to a good end, all through the power of God making himself vulnerable to the point of death on a cross. After all, this is what Lent is all about.

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

His steadfast love endures forever.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say it is so! Amen