

December 11, 2016
Sermon for Third Sunday in Advent
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Psalm 147:7-18

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Psalm 147:7–18 (ESV)

⁷ Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre! ⁸ He covers the heavens with clouds; he prepares rain for the earth; he makes grass grow on the hills. ⁹ He gives to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens that cry. ¹⁰ His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, ¹¹ but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love. ¹² Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! ¹³ For he strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your children within you. ¹⁴ He makes peace in your borders; he fills you with the finest of the wheat. ¹⁵ He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly. ¹⁶ He gives snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes. ¹⁷ He hurls down his crystals of ice like crumbs; who can stand before his cold? ¹⁸ He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow and the waters flow.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior,
Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

If you find yourself growing more than a little nostalgic each year as the candles of the Advent wreath announces that Christmas is drawing near; you have nothing to be ashamed of.

Not only is it a real blessing to have good memories of Christmases past, the longing for “auld lang sine”—“the old ‘long since’”—is no small part of the Biblical hope for the future, a hope for restoration, a hope for making old things new—like they were “back then” when everything really was “perfect”, a hope for making broken things whole, lost things found, tired things refreshed, *all* things made *new*.

For many of us, and maybe this includes you, those happy and blessed Christmas memories include the kind of popular stories that used to be heard on the radio or read around the table. *Twas the night before Christmas* being read aloud, putting cookies and milk out or even carrots for the reindeer?

We could never approach *the real* Christmas story in majesty or power, these other stories could be heart-warming and thought-provoking in their own way. One such story is “The Child Who Is King” by George Horace Lorimer. ¹

The story tells of good King Rupert, who decreed that there should be no sorrow or lack of cheer anywhere in his entire kingdom on Christmas Day. His motivation was not entirely noble, for in his kingdom it was believed that the Christ Child himself returned every year on Christmas Day. When the Child came, however, he always went first to the poor and needy. Though the king longed for a visit from the Child, and though he did everything in his power to make sure there was no one in need in his kingdom on that day, the Child always found someone in greater need than the king. Year after year his hope for a visit from the Christmas

Child was disappointed. To tell much more would be to ruin the story for you. Let me simply say that the story comes to mind this week because we are focusing our attention on a psalm that speaks of God's gracious provision for all creation right at the time when most of the forces of secular charity are working their hardest to carry out King Rupert's program, that is, to eliminate need in our community, in our nation, in our world.

At this time of year, it seems like every agency and community has their own programs. You have toys for tots, operation blue Santa, and there are at least three angel tree programs right here in Bowie. We get several letters at home around Thanksgiving and Christmas from food banks and other places asking us to buy meals for people that will come through their serving lines. I'm not saying that they aren't good programs, but it sort of brings the story of King Rupert into the 21st century.

With so many wanting to feed those in need, it might even seem like God and Goodwill are in the same business after all.

But if that were true, we would be forced to the unsettling conclusion that, if God would only do His job, we wouldn't need agencies like Goodwill or even Lutheran World Relief.

If all the earth really did get rain in just the right amount at just the right time, the famines would end. If there were enough jobs, if the grass grew on every hill so that every cow and sheep and goat had enough to eat, who would go hungry?

If God really takes delight in those who fear Him, why isn't He filling *all* His people with the finest wheat, plenty of food, three times a day, each and every day?

We know the answers to these questions, but it's crucial for us to *remember* the answers to these questions—perhaps more so at Advent than at any other time of year.

The psalmist knows the answers, too, and we need to hear the beginning of this evening's psalm, Psalm 147, to get the full picture that the psalmist is giving us here:

“¹ Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting. ² The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel. ³ He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. ⁴ He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names. ⁵ Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure. ⁶ The Lord lifts up the humble; he casts the wicked to the ground.”

Outcasts. Brokenhearted. Wounded. Humble. Wicked. This is no perfect world that the psalmist is speaking of; this is no paradise in which everyone eats his fill and everyone is happy.

Separation, injury, humiliation, pride, greed—these things have filled our world, and we daily struggle against them.

And so does God. He gives us free will, which we abuse by chasing every other earthly thing; even when those earthly things make us outcasts and cause injury, physical and mental, and still, we ignore Him.

Our psalm gives us a picture of the God who continues faithfully and lovingly to care for His world even though His world is broken and rebellious and turned away from Him and turned in on itself. Even in a world where His own are treated as outcasts, even in a world where His dear children have their hearts broken, He daily displays His extravagant generosity in keeping us all alive, in keeping this whole world going.

Still, couldn't most of this be said of our human agencies? They continue to work even when their gifts are stolen or squandered or hoarded. Taken and used by those who don't really need them, yet for the sake of a few, many continue to be served.

And perhaps you've felt this same way yourself more than once this year. You're doing your hardest just to hold things together, to keep things running, even though your efforts are rarely appreciated and seldom as effective as you would like them to be.

And for what? How long can you hold business or home or congregation together by your efforts? When will the resources run out? When will you wear out?

What could possibly change things so that it wouldn't require such constant and costly maintenance? What are you hoping for? What are you waiting for?

But God is not waiting. Nor is He simply the cosmic maintenance guy. He is preserving the world, but at the same time He is bringing to fulfillment His plans for His creation.

He works with purpose, and He is looking ahead, to the goal of all things. And that's why we're celebrating Advent again.

There is a section of Psalm 107 that speaks in very similar language of God's ongoing care for his creation, but it also points us forward to this second point that we've been making. *"Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in; ⁵ hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. ⁶ Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. ⁷ He led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in. ⁸ Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! ⁹ For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things."* Psalm 107:4–9 (ESV)

Once again, the psalm pictures a world far from perfect, a world where people go hungry and lose their way, a world in which places have become desolate, no longer fruitful and pleasant.

Life and hope are threatened with extinction, then the Lord answers. At the right moment He comes, satisfying the longing and filling the hungry with good things.

At the right moment, He came, in the Incarnation of Christ. From God's own Word we read: *"⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."* Galatians 4:4–5 (ESV)

We are fed, we are cared for. God has made us...has made you His child and has promised to never leave you nor forsake you. Forsake is an interesting word.

In Greek from Hebrews 13: ἐγκαταλείπω [*egkataleipo* /eng-kat-al-i-po/] v. From 1722 and 2641; GK 1593; Nine occurrences; AV translates as “forsake” seven times, and “leave” twice. **1** abandon, desert. 1a leave in straits, leave helpless. 1b totally abandoned, utterly forsaken. **2** to leave behind among, to leave surviving.¹

In Hebrew as used in the book of Joshua 1:5

אָזַב, אָזַב [‘*azab* /aw-zab/] v. A primitive root; TWOT 1594, 1595; GK 6440 and 6441; 215 occurrences; AV translates as “forsake” 129 times, “leave” 72 times, “leave off” four times, “faileth” twice, “fortify” twice, “help” twice, “committeth” once, “destitute” once, “refuseth” once, and “surely” once. **1** to leave, loose, forsake.²

God cares for us in all way, all the ways you can think of...and especially, as He saved us through His Son, the Babe of Bethlehem. Bethlehem in itself means more than one would think.

Βηθλέμ [*Bethleem* /bayth-leh-em/] n pr loc. Of Hebrew origin 1036; GK 1033; Eight occurrences; AV translates as “Bethlehem” eight times. **1** a village about six miles (10 km) south of Jerusalem. *Additional Information:* Bethlehem = “house of bread”.³

God give us the bread of Life through the one born in the house of bread.

“O Living Bread from Heaven”. Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

1 (The story “Legends of the Child Who Is King” first appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* on December 24, 1898. Part of the story later appeared as “The Child Who Is King” in *The Saturday Evening Post Christmas Book* [Indianapolis: The Curtis Publishing Company, 1976], 58–60.)

¹ Strong, J. (1995). *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*. Woodside Bible Fellowship.

² Strong, J. (1995). *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*. Woodside Bible Fellowship.

³ Strong, J. (1995). *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*. Woodside Bible Fellowship.

BEAUTIFUL SAVIOR, KING OF CREATION

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