

Psalm 36

Transgression speaks to the wicked
deep in his heart;
there is no fear of God
before his eyes.

²For he flatters himself in his own eyes
that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated.

³The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit;
he has ceased to act wisely and do good.

⁴He plots trouble while on his bed;
he sets himself in a way that is not good;
he does not reject evil.

⁵Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the
heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.

⁶Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;
your judgments are like the great deep;
man and beast you save, O LORD.

⁷How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
The children of mankind take refuge in the
shadow of your wings.

⁸They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your
delights.

⁹For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light do we see light.

¹⁰Oh, continue your steadfast love to those
who know you,
and your righteousness to the upright of heart!

¹¹Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me,
nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.

¹²There the evildoers lie fallen;
they are thrust down, unable to rise.

When this psalm was written much of what we take for granted as part of our physical world went unseen. There were no microscopes, so no one could see the small bacteria and other organisms that had such a big impact upon their lives. There were no telescopes, so more intricate information about stars and planets were unavailable. There were no infrared scopes or cameras, so much of what took place in the dark was invisible. There were no X-ray or other scanning devices, so almost all that took place inside the body was hidden from human observance. Perhaps that is why people back then were more comfortable with the concept of the supernatural as commonplace while today we tend to treat it as one of many forms of fantasy.

King David was no stranger to either visible or invisible struggles. If you read his story in First and Second Samuel in the Bible you will know that he spent a lifetime embroiled in struggle with worldly forces. He was a man of blood and war. He was also embroiled in struggle with invisible forces and was a man of sin and repentance. I think David knew that he lived in a world which was embroiled daily in the battle between what is good and God-chosen and what is bad and self-chosen. Sometimes we forget that we live in that same world and are embroiled in that same battle. In Psalm 36, David reminds us of this great invisible battle.

David begins by describing the work of the one who would steal us away from our maker and redeemer: ***"Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes. For he flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated. The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit; he has ceased to act wisely and do good."*** We are under bombardment, invisible but unrelenting, by temptation to turn from God's intention and design to our own desires and devices. Our God is mightier than all the forces of evil opposition. David tells us: ***"Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness***



to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; your judgments are like the great deep; man and beast you save, O LORD. How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings."

After presenting the two sides in this invisible battle, David boldly proclaims which side will be (and indeed is) victorious. ***"They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light."*** How do we, like David, emerge victorious in this invisible battle? Perhaps we should begin by acknowledging that the battle exists. The battle is a battle of wills—the will of our Lord who would draw us to Himself and the will of the devil who would draw us from our Lord. The weapon God gives us to use in this struggle is faith—faith in the Gospel promise of Christ and in the one who makes the promise. Faith that says in Christ we are reconciled to God. Faith that says that the sins of the repentant are forgiven and the lives of the baptized believers preserved by one stronger than ourselves. St. Paul describes how God equips the one who sees in Jesus the savior and champion in this struggle in Ephesians 6:13-18a: ***"Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. "***

Let us, along with David, ask God the following simple but meaningful prayer: ***"Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your righteousness to the upright of heart! Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me, nor the hand of the wicked drive me away."*** Amen.

In Christ's service,
Pastor Brian Shirey



Post Scripts:

Our lessons for this Sunday, December 13, 2020, The Third Sunday of Advent, are:

First Reading: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8--11

Psalm 126

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Gospel: John 1:6-8, 19-28

- † The situation of Western Pennsylvania during this pandemic has certainly become more precarious. The Governor has made an impassioned request to refrain from gathering in even small groups. Concerns are growing over the availability of hospital space and resources. And, although a vaccine may be in use within days, it will take a long time before enough people can be vaccinated to start to turn things around. Please be careful and be prudent in all you do.
- † To that end, it has been decided not to hold in-person worship at St. Luke's through the end of Advent (December 20). We will, of course, livestream worship at 8:15 a.m. Sunday morning. This will then be available for you to use at 10:45 or whenever is best for you. Both the livestreaming and the recorded service are available on our web site. I certainly wish this was not necessary, but I am convinced that it is. Please be patient and supportive during this difficult time. I very much hope and expect that we will be able to worship in person on Christmas Eve.
- † Thank you for all who watched last Sunday's worship on the web site. Please spread the word. It is one more tool for living out our life together at St. Luke's. Feel free to ask friends and family members unable to worship somewhere in person to join us on line.