



Mount Olive Devotion

The 23rd Week after Pentecost (November 2- 6, 2020)

Monday

Psalm 67

- ¹ May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us,
- ² that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations.
- ³ Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.
- ⁴ Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth.
- ⁵ Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.
- ⁶ The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us.
- ⁷ May God continue to bless us; let all the ends of the earth revere him.

The beginning of this national prayer may sound familiar. It is very much like the blessing in Numbers 6 which has been spoken at the end of worship at many churches down through the ages: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.” (Num. 6:24-26). Notice in this psalm that the purpose of God blessing us is that God’s righteous way and saving power might be known upon the earth. This is why we pray this prayer. If we are blessed, it is not for us alone, but in order to be a blessing to others. The third verse of this psalm is an invitation to all the nations to join in praising God, this God who judges the people with equity and guides the nations upon the earth. Oh how we pray for this! If only people everywhere would join in praising this God of equity and wisdom, how blessed we would be. Finally, in the last verse, we pray that not only us, and not only the nations might praise God, but that even “all the ends of the earth” would revere him. This is a prayer that the whole creation would regard God with awe and love. Again, this is our prayer, that all things in heaven and on earth would be filled with praises to God, and that through this continual praising, all might be blessed.

Prayer

How we praise you, Almighty God! How we praise you for your majesty and might! How we praise you for your care of all creation, your love for your people, and for your compassion shown in Jesus. Bless us so that we might be a blessing. Guide us so that we might be a guide to others. Give us faith, so that we might extend hope to others. We ask this in Christ’s name. AMEN.

Tuesday

Psalm 74:1-3, 20-23

¹ O God, why do you cast us off forever? Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture? ² Remember your congregation, which you acquired long ago, which you redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage. Remember Mount Zion, where you came to dwell. ³ Direct your steps to the perpetual ruins; the enemy has destroyed everything in the sanctuary. ²⁰ Have regard for your covenant, for the dark places of the land are full of the haunts of violence. ²¹ Do not let the downtrodden be put to shame; let the poor and needy praise your name. ²² Rise up, O God, plead your cause; remember how the impious scoff at you all day long. ²³ Do not forget the clamor of your foes, the uproar of your adversaries that goes up continually.

If you read the entirety of Psalm 74 you will note the detailed list of the destruction of the Great Temple in Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. Mention is even made of hatchets and hammers that hacked down carved work and desecrated the altar. This psalm is a national lament and a prayer for help in a time of national humiliation. Notice that the psalmist claims the identity of the people of God at the outset, referring to Israel as “the sheep of your pasture.” Verse 2 is even more detailed, calling Israel God’s “congregation...acquired long ago,...redeemed to be the tribe of [God’s] heritage.” In other words, the psalmist begins by reminding God that this isn’t a prayer from just any people, but from a people whom God has claimed as beloved. In verse 20, the psalmist reminds God of the covenant God made with them, that they would be forever God’s people. The psalmist is in effect saying, “You can’t ignore us, God. We are yours.” These words come to us also in these days of tumult in our land. There are many who wonder if maybe God has forgotten them: the poor and needy, the downtrodden, those whose enemies surround them. This word comes to us whom God has claimed. We too can pray this prayer, for we also have been claimed in baptism by our God and we live under the promise that God shall never let us go. We live in faith that God’s love is everlasting.

Prayer

In these days of tumult in our land, hear our prayer, O God. Hear our prayer to come to the aid of your people, and do not let the scoffers, the destroyers, or those who promote violence and hate, prevail. Instead, O God, let your wisdom, compassion, justice and peace prevail. We ask this boldly in the Name of Christ. AMEN.

Wednesday

Psalm 82

¹ God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment:

² “How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? ³ Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. ⁴ Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.” ⁵ They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk around in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. ⁶ I say, “You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you; ⁷ nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince.” ⁸ Rise up, O God, judge the earth; for all the nations belong to you!

Psalm 82 is one of those curious psalms that refers to a “divine council” where God holds forth as judge. Heavenly beings are assembled around the throne of the Almighty, and God issues judgment. In quotes are the words of God – verses 2-4, 6-7. God calls those who are judged ‘gods’ and ‘children of the Most High’ and God says to them that since they have not acted justly they will “die like mortals and fall like any prince.” This scene of judgment is meant also to be a warning to any human rulers. “If you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked, your rule will end,” says God. “If you fail to give justice to the weak and the orphan, and if you do not maintain the right of the lowly and destitute, you will be judged. If you fail to rescue those who need your help, your reign will be taken from you,” says God. This is very much like what we hear in some of St. Paul’s letters: “What you sow, that you shall reap.” This is a reminder to us all, that God’s justice may be delayed, but it will come.

Prayer

You are the Righteous Judge, O God. You are the One who judges the nations and its rulers with equity. Rise up and judge those despots and tyrants who seek only their own power and profit, and lay waste the needy of the earth. Champion the widow and the orphan and grant that those who have forgotten them will themselves be forgotten. Bring your justice upon the earth. In your Righteous Name, we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

Psalm 123

¹To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!

²As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, until he has mercy upon us.

³Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt.

⁴Our soul has had more than its fill of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.

The posture of humility is evident in this national prayer. The psalmist takes the place of a servant or a maid and cries out for mercy. It is unknown what situation was taking place in national life when this psalm was written. Who were those who were speaking words of contempt, those proud ones at ease, mocking God's people? We do not know. We do know that the writer of this psalm was weary of the treatment God's people were receiving and called out to God to have mercy. In our day there may be times when we feel put down as people of faith. There may be times when it seems that we are forever being made fun of as people who trust in an Unseen God, rather than in one who appears in profit and power. There may be times when we are weary of being called Fools for Christ, but we are reminded by this psalm, that God's mercy is only a breath away. Ask, and it shall be given.

Prayer

We are weary, Gracious God. We are weary of holding tight to you, of calling out to you in the night, and receiving no reply. Forgive us for our doubts, God. Forgive us for our short memories regarding your promises. We are your children. Come near and show us your grace. In your precious name, we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Psalm 126

¹ When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion we were like those who dream.

² Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

³ The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

⁴ Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb.

⁵ May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.

⁶ Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

Scholars believe that this psalm refers to the people of Israel as they returned from exile in Babylon. Their mouths were filled with laughter and their tongues shouted for joy. In a twist from the usual taunting that comes from the nations, here the nations praise God, saying, "The Lord has done great things for them." They had been people who had sown tears, and now they were reaping shouts of joy. Their harvest was an abundant crop of joy. We all know of times of joy, perhaps at a reunion with some long lost loved one, or a reconciliation with an estranged friend, or perhaps a joy over a new birth or a new opportunity before us. Joy often entails newness – new beginnings, new horizons, new life amongst us. Perhaps this is why Jesus said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Jesus brings joy. Even to us, when we have lived with weeping and mourning, there comes a day when joy breaks forth. Even to us who have despaired of life itself, there comes a day when God breaks forth, with a sunrise of hope. May it be so for us all.

Prayer

Gracious God, Heavenly Father, we are people in need of hope. Joy eludes us. Peace seems rare. Weeping seems to come to us more often these days. Come to us. Give us your peace and lead us into the way of faith and joy. You are the author of life. Come and live in us. We pray in Christ's name. AMEN.