



Mount Olive Devotion

The Fourth Week in Lent

Monday

Psalm 4

¹ Answer me when I call, O God of my right! You gave me room when I was in distress.

Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.

² How long, you people, shall my honor suffer shame?

How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies?

³ But know that the LORD has set apart the faithful for himself;
the LORD hears when I call to him.

⁴ When you are disturbed, do not sin;
ponder it on your beds, and be silent.

⁵ Offer right sacrifices,
and put your trust in the LORD.

⁶ There are many who say, "O that we might see some good!
Let the light of your face shine on us, O LORD!"

⁷ You have put gladness in my heart
more than when their grain and wine abound.

⁸ I will both lie down and sleep in peace;
for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety.

The fourth psalm is a plea for deliverance from one's enemies. In view of our present situation with COVID-19, this seems like an appropriate place to begin this series of reflections. We do pray for deliverance from this virus, and for all those who are working hard to come up with tests and strategies for isolating the virus, and still others who are working hard to produce a vaccine. Meanwhile, we are assured that "the Lord hears when we call to him." We are also encouraged to be silent, offer right sacrifices, and put our trust in the Lord. Being silent might be the hardest of those encouragements. We want to *do* something. We are encouraged to do something by offering right sacrifices, but before that we must sit and listen for God's leading. Then, assured of God's leading we get up to serve our neighbor, any in need, our family, or others who depend on us.

The final verses assure us that people of faith can tap into a contentment that is not dependent on worldly abundance, or earthly comforts. Rather, we have been given the gift that St. Paul calls "the peace that passes understanding." This peace comes from our knowledge that in God we "lie down in safety."

Prayer

Dearest Jesus, thank you for standing with us today as we confront a fearsome enemy. Give us courage. Give us strength to serve those in need. Give us faith that you are near, guiding us and blessing us. In your name we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Psalm 27:1-5, 13-14

¹The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

²When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh—
my adversaries and foes— they shall stumble and fall.

³Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

⁴One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.

⁵For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.

¹³I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

¹⁴Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

It is clear that the psalmist is experiencing a threat. What that threat is we cannot be sure. But notice the source of the writer's confidence. The Lord is a light in the darkness, salvation (i.e. deliverance) from enemies, and a stronghold in which to live in this fraught time. The house of the Lord has become for this psalmist a place of refuge, a place to gather strength and courage.

The Lord's presence is where we gather for strength and courage. We gather with family and/or friends in our homes, reading the Word, telling stories of faith, saying prayers for the world and one another. We do all we can to be a source of blessing to others, and then we wait for the Lord, confident that the Lord is at work even now.

Prayer

Strong Deliverer, when we are beset by forces larger than ourselves, give us faith and courage. Help us to see signs of your deliverance, and ways that our hands can be doing your work in the world. We trust you, O God. We wait on you. AMEN.

Wednesday

Psalm 46:1-7, 10-11

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,

though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

³though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.

⁵God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns.

⁶The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.

⁷The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

¹⁰“Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations,

I am exalted in the earth.”

¹¹The LORD of hosts is with us;

the God of Jacob is our refuge

The sea, in Old Testament imagery, was always the symbol for chaos. It was vast, uncontrolled, and at that time, largely unknown. Other waters were more benign, even blessings, such as the streams that “make glad the city of God.” These streams were a way of talking about the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was a source of spiritual refreshment, even ‘living water’, as Jesus would say.

The Word of God is our Living Water. When we are thirsty we drink from its gushing spring. We take in the promises of God, the assurances of Christ’s presence with us in suffering, and the Spirit’s guidance. We also share with others where they can obtain this living water. We continually say, “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.”

Prayer

Lord of Heaven and Earth, when we are thirsty, draw us to your gushing spring. We trust that you, O God, are the One who provides us with all we need for life and faith. Let us draw deeply from your spring and receive what we need to live each day in faith and hope. In Christ’s name, we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

Psalm 91:1-7, 14-16

¹ You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,

² will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.”

³ For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence;

⁴ he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

⁵ You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day,

⁶ or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday.

⁷ A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.

¹⁴ Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name.

¹⁵ When they call to me, I will answer them; will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue them and honor them.

¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.

This psalm of protection is one of the most beloved passages in Scripture. Many times this psalm has been read at the bedside of the sick and dying. In the second verse there is a phrase that original worshippers were encouraged to repeat in the assembly: “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.” This can be for any of us a mantra that we repeat each day. There is great mystery in suffering, why it comes to some and not to others. We don’t know why some will be delivered from “the deadly pestilence” and why others will not. We don’t know why “ten thousand” may fall, and yet others are not stricken. What we do know is that God’s promise, “I am with you in trouble”, is true, and that ultimately nothing can harm us, for our place in God’s house is secure.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you gave healing to many. You wept at the grave of Lazarus. You experienced suffering and death in your own body. You are familiar with all our pain and sorrow. Bless us with the assurance that you are our refuge and fortress, One in whom we can trust. Grant us your peace. AMEN.

Friday

Psalm 121

¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come?

² My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

³ He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.

⁴ He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

⁵ The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand.

⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

⁷ The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.

⁸ The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.

Psalm 121 is the Keeper Psalm. Notice how many times the word ‘keep’ is used. It means to preserve and protect. It is a very common word in the Hebrew Bible. It is the job, for instance, of the night watchman to be the keeper. It is the task of the shepherd to be the keeper of the sheep. The psalmist says that *the Lord* is our keeper. This Lord is the One who made all things. This Lord is One who never sleeps, never tires, never goes on vacation. We are kept always by this Keeper. In the last verse we are told that this One keeps us from our “going out” to our “coming in.” That was the Hebrew way of talking about life. When we are born, we ‘go out’ from God through our mothers. We live our life, and then at our death we ‘come in’, we come back to God. So this Keeper preserves and protects us from our going out to our coming in, and even forevermore.

Prayer

We praise you, Gracious God, for your eternal love. We thank you that you are our keeper, protecting and preserving us all our days. Help us to be keepers of others, our neighbors, our families, any we come in contact with. Help us also share your eternal love. In Christ’s name, we pray. AMEN.