

2015_02 Midweek Passion Series
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

Psalms of the Penitent
The Afflicted Penitent Hopes in the Lord

Psalm 102

INI

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father, the God of all comfort, who comforts us in every trouble and from His Son Jesus Christ, who is the comfort of God made flesh and the glorified hope of everlasting life. Amen.

Dear fellow servants and children of God,

So you've heard the tragic diagnosis. It is as you had feared. You've dreaded this moment; rehearsed it in your head; and now it has come. You sit in the chair across from the doctor as he looks at you with hands folded at his desk. Your file lays open in front of him. In care and tact, he tells it to you straight; no sugar coating. You know you should be thinking of questions: what are your options, what will the treatment be, what sort of pain lay ahead ... but ultimately, when he is finished, all you can manage to formulate in your mind is one question: "What hope is there?"

This very same question is on the mind of our psalmist as he writes the prayer we consider this evening in Psalm 102. The title given to our psalm is this:

*A prayer of an afflicted man when he is faint
and pours out a lament before the Lord.*

The psalmist is pouring out a lament. And that is what Christian hope is all about. Christian hope is about pouring your affliction into a prayer. And that is what we will do this evening. Pour our affliction into a prayer.

Our psalm divides for us into three sections; three prayers that seek to answer the question that confronts us. (1) In verses 1-3 we offer a prayer of LAMENT. That is, we pour out our affliction by expressing our sorrows. (2) In verses 8-11 we offer a prayer of HUMILIATION. That is to say, affliction humbles us to the point of discovering the only way to find an answer to our question is in a prayer of HUMILIATION. (3) And lastly, in verses 12-17 we offer a prayer of HOPE. That is to say, we find an answer and that answer from God is understood by the hope we find in Christ Jesus our Lord. A prayer of LAMENT ... HUMILIATION ... and HOPE.

v.1-3 A Prayer of LAMENT – what hope is there?

“What hope is there?” Ultimately, when we zoom out to view the bigger picture, this question is not a question for the doctor. It is a question for God. This question is at its core, a prayer. A prayer of lament. It is a time to lament our affliction. It is a time to cry out and pour out our suffering. In times of affliction, we find that there is really only one question that it all boils down to: What hope is there?

It is a question that confronts Kimberly. I met Kimberly at the care center where we conduct worship services. She looks so young, and yet at the same time so older than her years. Her feet move slowly, deliberately. She knows that if doesn't concentrate while walking, she will trip and fall on her face. Her lipstick is smeared and her bright blue eye shadow has gotten into her eyebrows. Her hands shake because of the sickness and her voice quivers so much it is difficult to understand her. She explains how for a while she couldn't eat or take her meds because of the shaking. The combination of M.S., fibermialgia, and huntingston disease have made it difficult for her to do even the most basic of tasks. And she wonders, what hope is there?

It is a question that confronts an alzheimer patient. He knows dementia will soon spread to such an extent that he may no longer recognize his own wife. He knows it will become so severe that she can no longer take care of him. He will have to enter a group home and who knows what he will become in that place? And he wonders, what hope is there?

It is a question that confronts an abused child. She is grown now. In her twenties. Trying to start a family. She'd like to think the past is behind her, but it never really is. Too many memories that cannot be forgotten. Too much guilt that she thinks will never go way. Too much anger that she thinks can never be overcome. With how messed up she is, she wonders if she can make a future, make a family, make a marriage. She wonders, what hope is there?

It all boils down to one question. Each of these afflictions boil down to one question and that one question has confronted Jesus. They reach the Garden and Jesus goes off far enough that his disciples cannot hear his groaning. Great beads of sweat mixed with tears are dripping from his beard. The cup of God's wrath has been presented before Him and He is utter anguish over the choice that must be made. It all boils down to one question: What hope is there? And in a prayer of lament, Jesus pours Himself out. Into Kimberly's prayers; into the Alzheimer's patient's prayers; into the abused child's prayers; He is pouring himself into your prayers; into this prayer:

- 1 Hear my prayer, O LORD;
let my cry for help come to you.
- 2 Do not hide your face from me
when I am in distress.
Turn your ear to me;
when I call, answer me quickly.
- 3 For my days vanish like smoke;
my bones burn like glowing embers.

Christian hope begins with a prayer of lament.

v.8-11 A Prayer of HUMILIATION – but why?

But it doesn't stop there. When we come to this issue of the afflicted Christian the conversation inevitably moves toward another question: why? We are afflicted, yes. But the question is: why? This is a time where we face the most difficult affliction of all – more than the physical, mental, or emotional affliction we face, this is the affliction of the cross. And the only prayer that can address this question is a prayer of humiliation. Christian hope is about pouring your affliction into a prayer of humiliation.

- 8 All day long my enemies taunt me;
those who rail against me use my name as a curse.
- 9 For I eat ashes as my food
and mingle my drink with tears
- 10 because of your great wrath,
for you have taken me up and thrown me aside.
- 11 My days are like the evening shadow;
I wither away like grass.

And if anyone knew what it was to be humiliated, it was Job. Alongside of Kimberly, the man with alzheimers, and the woman who was abused as a child, we could mention Job. The book of Job is an ongoing dialog between God, the devil, Job and the world.

A conversation is takes place. Although, for nearly forty chapters of Job, God is silent. For nearly forty chapters, Job is afflicted: he has lost his property; he has lost his family; he has lost his health. Job and the world go back and forth debating, philosophizing, asking questions, taunting and rebuking each other but ultimately they are getting no answers. God is silent. For forty chapters God is silent and listening.

The debate has risen to God's throne. Our enemies taunt us; the devil, the world, and our flesh taunt us with questions and arguments. We would like to agree with them that God is not really behind all this. We want to say that God is not really in control. Perhaps we say evil is to blame; and to some degree we would be right. Evil is indeed to blame. But do we have no part in this? Does God have no part in this? Is this not the hand of His wrath? We just cannot escape the truth: we are cursed and God is the Almighty Maker of Heaven and Earth. It was God who allowed the devil to afflict Job. And it is God who allows the devil to afflict you. We would like an answer to the question: But why? When will God speak? When will He answer us?

Well, He does answer. But when he does, at first we don't like the way it sounds. He speaks to Job in a great storm, saying, "But why? Why do you question me or pretend to know why I have done what I have done? Why will you not see? Why will you not see that in your affliction, I am God. Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! ... where were you when I shut up the sea; when I fixed its limits and said this far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves must stop? Where were you?"

It leaves us helpless and hopeless. "Here our proud waves must stop!" It is in this prayer that we pour out our pride and crucify our sinful nature. He gives it to us straight; no sugar coating... while we might try to formulate questions, arguments, debate – we realize there is nothing we can do; nothing we can do to give ourselves hope or escape the curse that our sin has brought upon this world. And even more so, we can do nothing to help Jesus. Or to save Him from the taunts of His enemies. Or to deliver Him from God's great wrath.

We can do nothing because this is God's will; that His own Son should accept our affliction and our sins and God's wrath. He hangs from the cross because His Father so desires it. He is thrown aside, cast out of God's heavenly presence because it is God's will. He pours Himself into a prayer of humiliation; into your afflictions and your prayers. And in this utter humiliation, in this total abandonment, Jesus remains the only one in all the world with the right to ask the question: "but why? My God, My God why have you forsaken me?"

And that is why our prayer is a prayer of humiliation. It is a prayer of repentance. It is a confession that we believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and there is no getting around it. He is our Creator, and we are His creatures. As a fellow theologian put it, "God is God, and we are not." And this means He alone is the only one who can save us; He alone can be our redeemer; and the affliction of cross is

the way we must go. Yet through suffering, we discover God; God who calls us to trust in Him and who promises to save us.

v.12-17 A Prayer of HOPE – The Answer is Christ Jesus

Which brings us to the third and last portion of our prayer. A prayer of hope. We are afflicted. And in our prayers we pour out that affliction and pour out ourselves into the hands of God. In our prayer of lament, we pour out our affliction. In our prayer of humiliation, we pour out our pride. And now we may pray a prayer of hope. For all that is left for the afflicted Christian is God and His Son Jesus Christ. It all boils down to this answer...

- 12 But you, O LORD, sit enthroned forever;
your renown endures through all generations.
- 13 You will arise and have compassion on Zion,
for it is time to show favor to her;
the appointed time has come.
- 14 For her stones are dear to your servants;
her very dust moves them to pity.
- 15 The nations will fear the name of the LORD,
all the kings of the earth will revere your glory.
- 16 For the LORD will rebuild Zion
and appear in his glory.
- 17 He will respond to the prayer of the destitute;
he will not despise their plea.

For three days there was no answer. His bare, beaten, bloody body was buried. And there was no answer. All question, all debate was worthless now. Jesus was dead. God's Son had been put to death on account of our sins. And just when we think all is lost, empty, dead, and hopeless, then we discover that all is found, fulfilled, living, and hopeful. That is why Christian hope is about pouring your affliction into a prayer.

And that prayer is a prayer for the resurrection. For the appointed time to come. Our LORD sits enthroned forever and ever, through all generations, and His Son will not see corruption. He knows you have waited. However long, three days, three months, three years; if you should have to wait for 40 chapters of your life, God will not let you down. And after three days, we do have an answer. An answer to our prayers. An answer to our affliction. God has arisen. Jesus has arisen. It is time to have compassion on Zion; to rebuild her rubble; it is time to rise up over all nations and let His glory be known. And in the restoration of Jesus, God is restoring us. Restoring the fallen ruins.

Forgiving all your sins. Taking away all your guilt. And coming to you with an answer in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The appointed time has come and there is hope.

*He will respond to the prayer of the destitute;
he will not despise their plea.*

He will not despise the plea of Kimberly. Recently she tells me how she has been praying about this everyday. Asking God to help her; to heal her. As of Christmas she tells me that she can eat on her own again. The shaking has resided. And she hopes to move into an apartment with her mother by this spring. And she tells me, there is hope.

He will not despise the plea of the man with Alzheimer's. As much as he may forget who his wife is and who he is, he will not forget who God is, nor will God forget who he is. As his mind goes, there is a memory of God in his heart that this disease cannot touch. He grew up rehearsing that the same liturgy Sunday after Sunday and singing those same hymns year after year, and in this, God's Word has touched a place in his heart that cannot be touched by dementia. So he will pray. His wife will come with the paster, the white cloth spread out, the silver cup and the small wafers set before him, and they will pray: "Our Father who art in heaven..." And he will remember, there is hope.

He will not despise the plea of the girl who was abused as a child. As much as she thinks she is messed up, spoiled, lost, and guilty – she discovers there is a place in God's kingdom for her. While she cannot forget every memory, she can remember something more powerful. A memorial that her Savior has left behind. A renown that endures and a compassion that knows no limits. For God has risen up and His memory is of His Son Jesus Christ, a restoration of all that is good and pure and clean; and it belongs to her. And God tells her, "there is hope, for the creation itself groans in these birth pains; because I have subjected it in hope; hope of deliverance; hope of life; hope of a new creation. This hope is yours, and the answer is yours in Christ Jesus."

*He will respond to the prayer of the destitute;
he will not despise their plea.*

The answer is Jesus.

You've have heard the diagnosis. And it is as you've feared. But you are no longer looking at the face of the doctor; you are no longer looking within yourself; you are no longer looking to the world around you. As much as you have many the questions you want to ask, as much as you are wondering what lay ahead: what options you have,

what the treatment will be, what pain you will face in the days ahead ... as much as you want to ask the question "why" ... you know the answer; you know the answer cannot be fully answered by what you see. So you look to the face of another. You look to the face of Jesus and you pour your affliction into a prayer. A prayer of LAMENT; A prayer of HUMILIATION; A prayer of HOPE – you have poured out your affliction and Christ has taken it. And it all boils down to one answer: There is hope, through Christ Jesus your crucified, risen, and glorified Lord and Savior.

Hear my prayer, O LORD; let my cry for help come to you. Amen.