

Devotion: Thursday, March 26, 2020

Psalm 102

Hear my prayer, Lord;
let my cry for help come to you.
²Do not hide your face from me
when I am in distress.
Turn your ear to me;
when I call, answer me quickly.
³For my days vanish like smoke;
my bones burn like glowing embers.
⁴My heart is blighted and withered like grass;
I forget to eat my food.
⁵In my distress I groan aloud
and am reduced to skin and bones.
⁶I am like a desert owl,
like an owl among the ruins.
⁷I lie awake; I have become
like a bird alone on a roof.
⁸All day long my enemies taunt me;
those who rail against me use my name as a curse.
⁹For I eat ashes as my food
and mingle my drink with tears
¹⁰because of your great wrath,
for you have taken me up and thrown me aside.
¹¹My days are like the evening shadow;
I wither away like grass.

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

I apologize for not getting a devotion out yesterday. I took Wednesday as my Sabbath, and I celebrated my 65th birthday by taking a long solitary hike and practicing social distancing with my family as they sang “Happy Birthday” through surgical masks while standing six feet away. We partied like it was (with my apologies to the late Prince) 1349, the year of the Black Plague. Good times.

But what struck me, in these past two weeks of social isolation, is the disconnectedness, the loneliness that can creep in during these corona virus times.

I miss hugging my children and grand children.

I miss the fellowship of church.

I miss going to a restaurant.

I want to take these things for granted again, and the reality is that we cannot

Psalm 102 as written above is known as a messianic psalm. It is a prophecy of Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus knew what it was to be lonely. In fact, I believe Jesus knew loneliness as no other person who has ever lived has known loneliness.

Jesus understands what it is to be rejected. He can relate to that “nobody cares about me” feeling. John said about Jesus, “He came to His own and His own did not receive Him.” (Jn. 1:11) Think about this. Jesus was rejected by his own family. For a long time they did not believe in Him.

He was rejected by his friends. In his hometown, in the place where he grew up, in the place where he went to school, people refused to listen to him. He was rejected by his followers. His disciples, in his hour of greatest need, deserted him.

Even on the cross he was rejected by his own Father. You remember as he died on the cross he cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” At that moment Jesus Christ became the loneliest person who ever has lived or ever will live. Jesus understands our loneliness.

He knows what it is to be alone, and he knows what it is to be lonely. But Jesus has given us a promise that with God we will never be alone. “Jesus answered them, ‘Do you now believe? Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.’” (John 16:31-32)

If you are a Christian stuck at home today you may be lonely, but it’s not because you’re alone. As a child of God you enjoy the permanent company of God who said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Heb. 13:5) You enjoy fellowship with God the Son who said, “Lo, I am with you always.” (Mt. 28:20) You enjoy the continuing presence of God the Holy Spirit who we are told, “will abide with us forever.” (Jn. 14:16) The first cure for loneliness is to reach up to the Savior.

Secondly, reach out to the suffering. If you are lonely look for someone else who is lonely and befriend them; be a blessing to them. Forget about your loneliness and try to cure their loneliness.

Someone once wrote these wise words:

“It is no new thing to be lonely. It comes to all of us sooner or later...If we try to retreat from it we end in a darker hell...but if we face it, if we remember that there are a million others like us, if we try to reach out to comfort them and not ourselves, we find in the end we are lonely no longer.”

In the book, God's Trombones, James Johnson begins the story of creation by writing, "God stepped out into space and looked around, and God said, 'I'm lonely. I think I'll make me a world.'"

This may not be exactly how the authors of Genesis put it, but I think Johnson's creation story has some basic biblical truth nonetheless. Why else would God start off the ten commandments with, "Love me with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength"? Why, except, that God was lonely, and that's why God created a world. This commandment, also identified by Jesus as one of the two most important commandments, makes it clear that after creating the world, God wants something from the world in return. God wants to be in relation with us in return.

And since God is eternal, we have a cure for our loneliness forever.

I know this event in our history will pass, because God is with us.

Let us pray:

God of grace, we come into your presence with gratitude, O God, that you hear our prayers.

Help us when we struggle to carry the cross of Christ faithfully this Lenten season. For those who tread on ground that is rocky with instability in their homes or jobs, we ask for your calming presence. For those who cannot find their way in the quagmire of grief and loss, we ask for the light of the Lord to guide them on the journey. For those who are ill or providing care for them, we ask for the peaceful serenity of the Holy Spirit.

We know that to carry the cross is a commitment to a way of life; we try to carry the cross proudly. But sometimes we falter. Help us in our travels that we might walk steadfast and sure to Jerusalem -- and beyond. Amen.

Stay safe

Pastor Jack