

10th Sunday After Pentecost August 16, 2020

Psalm 67

We praise God, even in the midst of turmoil.

The Psalms are the hymnal of the Jewish people. Tradition says they were written by King David, although some might have been, the author of most is anonymous. Like all poetry the psalms cover the gamut of emotion: Joy, love, anger, despair, excitement. They also take many forms Praise, Thanksgiving, Lament.

Whatever their content, from complaint to God to lament for what is going on, with few exceptions they end with praise of God. With acknowledgment of God's steadfast love and faithfulness. Even when the travails of life close in on them, God is there and for that God is to be praised.

It is what we do as people of faith- Give praise and thanks to God in all circumstances- not in a "Thank you sir may I have another" kind of way, but because we recognize that we could not live in moments like this (2020 anyone? Pandemic, Derecho) without the God who gave us breath.

This does not mean that we don't talk back, we don't complain, and shout, and wonder where the heck are you, God! If you look at the psalms, all of scripture, the Gospel text that was assigned today of the Canaanite woman you will find examples of this talk back. Many of the psalms read a lot like a Facebook or Twitter thread during this disaster. A mixture of thankfulness and support along with complaint. And the complaint, at least sometimes I'm sure- is not because folks really think someone is not working to help them, but just because we are tired of it all. Lament, complaint, is a time honored and faithful way to express ourselves to God.

So, if in this moment right now you need to do that- go right ahead. If you are done with it all- take a break. We've got your back for a bit.

As I pointed out on Wednesday- I was there. Not so much for myself, but for others. I have colleagues who are dealing with damage to their own homes, damage to their churches, and a spouse recovering from a serious neck injury. Another and with the recent death of a father and serious surgery for themselves- all of this underlaid by a pandemic that as of today would have been the 3rd leading cause of death for the year in 2018. And I know there are others in our community dealing with similar things.

But even as you shout your anger, frustration, fear, doneness to God- worship with us.

If the beginning of this psalm sounds familiar, it is because it echoes the Aaronic or Priestly blessing that we sometimes use in worship. It is understood that this blessing, when used, comes directly from God to those being blessed.

The Lord Bless you and Keep you

The Lord's face shine on you

And be gracious to you.

The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.

In the psalms- blessing is understood to be the provision of our continuing needs of life... and we have indeed received those. We are all here, reasonably clean, fed, and watered. Better so than we would have been even two days ago. During this time in the dark we have received power from neighbors in lines strung across lawns. We have received ice and information from neighbors and

strangers. We've had our daily bread- even if it was cooked on a grill or just a PB&J sandwich. We've had neighbors help us chop up trees, roof homes, move debris. We've had hundreds, thousands of strangers working round the clock to get us power back.

These are indeed blessings. Provisions of what we need, for one more day. And then another. And then another.

Interesting, isn't it- how the blessings so often come in the form of people.

I mean, we could all have just hunkered down in our homes. Cleared our own yards run our own generators, kept the open gas lines and stores to ourselves. But we didn't, because that's not who God created us to be. We worked and are working together to restore our communities. To get power for people to refill oxygen tanks and keep medical supplies cold. To cool them when they are hot. To feed them when they do not have food. To give them water when they have nothing to drink. This is God blessing us- providing what we need for the day.

And for this we give God thanks and praise. We proclaim- this is our God at work. In my hands and yours, providing what we need for this day. And we trust providing us what we need for the next.

And that is what I was reminded of when I came to church on Wednesday- done with all this. Done with 2020. Done with what seemed like one disaster- personal and corporate after another. Not sure what I was going to say to you as your Pastor and kind of afraid what would come out of my mouth. I turned to corner- and there was Jesus. Flat Jesus to be precise. Right beside the door that had been empty when I had left not an hour or so before. The same Flat Jesus who watched over our worship this Summer from the window in the nave. Who

greeted us with the reminder that wearing a mask is what Jesus would do at the front door. Who invited us to communion a couple of weeks ago. There he was- with this reminder- "I am always with you". I am always with you.

I needed that reminder. That both through you, my friends, and in a very direct sense- Jesus is with me. And just that reminder melted so much of my stress away. It did not disappear. God will not erase our pain, just make the pandemic go away, bring the power back just like that. But the peace of God, the knowledge that God does bless us with what we need for this day and the next, lowers the level of that stress and anxiety.

And so, even if the power had not been on, we would have gathered here this Sunday morning to give praise and thanks to the God who blesses us. Who provides for us enough for this day. And then the next. And then the next.

To give thanks and praise to the God who comes to us in the cherry pickers of linemen working to restore power. In people bearing chainsaws to cut up trees. Bringing blues tarps to cover damaged roofs.

To give thanks and praise to Jesus, who hunkered in the basement with us during the storm. Who wept with us over the trees we lost, the home and property damaged. Who saves us from the worst of ourselves and through whom we can be the creation God intended us to be; loving all people, caring for all people, working for the good of our community, our county, our state, our country, our world.

This beautiful August morning, in the midst of pandemic and knowing there are still people without power we give thanks and praise to God. We sing for joy at the blessings God has given us. Thanks be to God.