

OneWord

A Lenten Litany of Psalms

Volume 8

March 2, 2014 – April 20, 2014

Sermon Series: A Lenten Litany of Psalms

Lent is a time when the church returns its focus to prayer.

We are engaged in prayer throughout the year, but during Lent we seek a deeper understanding and commitment to our practice of prayer, to strengthen our connection with God.

During the Sundays of Lent I will be preaching from the Psalms, because they have been a school of prayer for generations of believers. I have found that praying the Psalms reveals many aspects of my relationship with God. The Psalmists help me get in touch with feelings, hopes, disappointments, desires and dreams I did not realize I had inside. In the process of sharing all of these things with God in prayer, I understand myself better in relationship to him and to others.

This is the journey I hope we can take together as a congregation in Lent. By reading and praying the Psalms in worship and study, may we affirm what the writer of Psalm 2 proclaims, "Happy are all who take refuge in him."

Yours in Christ,
Doug Learned
Pastor

OneWord

The Word for Worship

As a Way of Life

Volume 8

OneWord is a way for our congregation to carry the Bible readings we experience in our worship services into our daily walk with Christ. This booklet of scripture passages and discussion starters is an aid for any group, individual, family or ministry to reflect on and internalize God's word, and to keep his word at the center of our church life.

The more all of us are involved in the OneWord program, the more opportunities there are for the Holy Spirit to weave our conversations and personal lives together in Christian community by way of conversations, studies and devotions.

Please take as many copies of this free booklet as you need, for use wherever you might want to pause with the Lord and others to connect to his message of good news and hope. Keep a copy at your desk, in your car, near your small group materials, or at the dining room table.

All generations of our congregation are using this OneWord program as a way to stay connected and grow in our common life as a community of Christ's disciples, followers and ambassadors of his good news. Please use this booklet as you like--for a short devotional or a weekly discussion with others, in anticipation before or in reflection following the Sunday service.

How to Use this Booklet

- Whether alone or in a group, read aloud the series and sermon summaries, and then the NRSV or The Message version of the Bible passage for the week.
- Take a few moments to write notes for yourself and/or comment to others what aspects of the passage stand out to you, and might connect with your current life circumstances. Note also what you find difficult to understand or even objectionable at first reading.
- Pray individually or as a group for the Holy Spirit's lead in your reflections and conversations around the passage.
- Use both your own notes and the conversation questions to guide you in journaling, reflection, prayerful meditation, or group discussion.
- As much as possible, try to avoid simply commenting on your likes or dislikes about the current series or passages, so your reflections and conversation can help you focus on your own need for inward transformation in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.
- Take note of what further questions come up for you or your group that you might want to share with Doug Learned, or pick up for further conversation at a later date.
- Adapt your individual or group practices to fit the needs of your setting or circumstances, while keeping in the spirit of the OneWord program.

Suggested for Memorization

“Happy are all who take refuge in him.”

-Psalm 2:11b

March 2

Transfiguration of the Lord

Psalm 2

“Should We Fear the Lord?”

NRSV

Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his anointed, saying, “Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us.” He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, “I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.” I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, “You are my son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, with trembling, kiss his feet, or he will be angry, and you will perish in the way; for his wrath is quickly kindled. Happy are all who take refuge in him.

The Message

Why the big noise, nations? Why the mean plots, peoples? Earth-leaders push for position, Demagogues and delegates meet for summit talks, The God-deniers, the Messiah-defiers: “Let’s get free of God! Cast loose from Messiah!” Heaven-throned God breaks out laughing. At first he’s amused at their presumption; Then he gets good and angry. Furiously, he shuts them up: “Don’t you know there’s a King in Zion? A coronation banquet is spread for him on the holy summit.” Let me tell you what God said next. He said, “You’re my son, And today is your birthday. What do you want? Name it: Nations as a present? Continents as a prize? You can command them all to dance for you, Or throw them out with tomorrow’s trash.”

So, rebel-kings, use your heads; Upstart-judges, learn your lesson:
Worship God in adoring embrace, Celebrate in trembling awe.
Kiss Messiah! Your very lives are in danger, you know; His anger is
about to explode, But if you make a run for God—you won't
regret it!

For Conversation and Contemplation

Proverbs 9: 10 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight." This Psalm is set in the context of God's new appointed king being challenged by plots of rebellion. How would you describe the relationship between the LORD and his king in this passage? What does it mean to fear the LORD? Look up Matthew 17: 1-9. Is there a connection between what happens in that passage and Psalm 2?

Notes

March 5

Ash Wednesday

Psalm 51:1-17

“Have Mercy”

NRSV

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.

You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

The Message

Generous in love—God, give grace! Huge in mercy—wipe out my bad record. Scrub away my guilt, soak out my sins in your laundry. I know how bad I've been; my sins are staring me down. You're the One I've violated, and you've seen it all, seen the full extent of my evil. You have all the facts before you; whatever you decide about me is fair. I've been out of step with you for a long time, in the wrong since before I was born. What you're after is truth from the inside out. Enter me, then; conceive a new, true life. Soak me in your laundry and I'll come out clean, scrub me and I'll have a snow-white life. Tune me in to foot-tapping songs, set these once-broken bones to dancing. Don't look too close for blemishes, give me a clean bill of health. God, make a fresh start in me, shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life.

Don't throw me out with the trash, or fail to breathe holiness in me. Bring me back from gray exile, put a fresh wind in my sails! Give me a job teaching rebels your ways so the lost can find their way home. Commute my death sentence, God, my salvation God, and I'll sing anthems to your life-giving ways. Unbutton my lips, dear God; I'll let loose with your praise.

Going through the motions doesn't please you, a flawless performance is nothing to you. I learned God-worship when my pride was shattered. Heart-shattered lives ready for love don't for a moment escape God's notice.

For Conversation and Contemplation

This year in confirmation class we talked about what it means to confess sin, a practice central to Ash Wednesday and the Lenten season. People often focus on specific sins, but sometimes it's helpful to think about sin overall as an attitude or desire to live independently of God—far away from or out of relationship with our Father, as the prodigal son in Luke 15.

Consider not only how you can reverse your ways from specific sins, but even more how a redemptive, close relationship with God will lead in you in right paths and cover every sin.

Notes

March 9

1st Sunday in Lent

Psalm 32

“The Joy of Forgiveness”

NRSV

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.

For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah*

Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,” and you forgave the guilt of my sin. *Selah*

Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.

You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. *Selah*

I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.

Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord.

Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

The Message

Count yourself lucky, how happy you must be— you get a fresh start, your slate's wiped clean.

Count yourself lucky— God holds nothing against you and you're holding nothing back from him.

When I kept it all inside, my bones turned to powder, my words became daylong groans.

The pressure never let up; all the juices of my life dried up. Then I let it all out; I said, "I'll make a clean breast of my failures to God."

Suddenly the pressure was gone—my guilt dissolved, my sin disappeared.

These things add up. Every one of us needs to pray; when all hell breaks loose and the dam bursts we'll be on high ground, untouched.

God's my island hideaway, keeps danger far from the shore, throws garlands of hosannas around my neck.

Let me give you some good advice; I'm looking you in the eye and giving it to you straight: "Don't be ornery like a horse or mule that needs bit and bridle to stay on track."

God-defiers are always in trouble; God-affirmers find themselves loved every time they turn around.

Celebrate God. Sing together—everyone!
All you honest hearts, raise the roof!

For Conversation and Contemplation

We experience something very special when we come clean with God about our failings and our need for forgiveness. In the process, we are liberated to live more fully in the present and with hope for the future. There is a sense of “putting down” our burdens, and carrying them no more. Even if we still have to deal with some of the consequences of our wrongdoings, we can do so with promise for a better future. Is this true of your own experiences? See verse 9. Have you ever played the horse or mule?

Notes

March 16

2nd Sunday in Lent

Psalm 121

"The Prayer That Works"

NRSV

I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.

The Message

I look up to the mountains; does my strength come from mountains? No, my strength comes from God, who made heaven, and earth, and mountains. He won't let you stumble, your Guardian God won't fall asleep. Not on your life! Israel's Guardian will never doze or sleep. God's your Guardian, right at your side to protect you— Shielding you from sunstroke, sheltering you from moonstroke. God guards you from every evil, he guards your very life. He guards you when you leave and when you return, he guards you now, he guards you always.

For Conversation and Contemplation

Here the Lord is described as your keeper and shade. Does that mean you will experience no hardships in life? Assuming we will experience hardships, what does it mean for God to be your protector?

Notes

March 23

3rd Sunday in Lent

Psalm 95

“His People”

NRSV

O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed. O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. O that today you would listen to his voice! Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your ancestors tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. For forty years I loathed that generation and said, “They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they do not regard my ways.” Therefore in my anger I swore, “They shall not enter my rest.”

The Message

Come, let's shout praises to God, raise the roof for the Rock who saved us! Let's march into his presence singing praises, lifting the rafters with our hymns. And why? Because God is the best, High King over all the gods. In one hand he holds deep caves and caverns, in the other hand grasps the high mountains. He made Ocean—he owns it! His hands sculpted Earth! So come, let us worship: bow before him, on your knees before God, who made us! Oh yes, he's our God, and we're the people he pastures, the flock he feeds. Drop everything and listen, listen as he speaks: "Don't turn a deaf ear as in the Bitter Uprising, As on the day of the Wilderness Test, when your ancestors turned and put me to the test.

For forty years they watched me at work among them, as over and over they tried my patience. And I was provoked—oh, was I provoked! 'Can't they keep their minds on God for five minutes? Do they simply refuse to walk down my road?' Exasperated, I exploded, 'They'll never get where they're headed, never be able to sit down and rest.'"

For Conversation and Contemplation

We take pride in our accomplishments, and such pride is often appropriate. Much of our success is earned. This Psalm, however, seems to highlight the importance of taking a humble stance before God, as sheep in need of a shepherd to guide them. What kind of pride is the right kind of pride for Christian living?

Notes

March 30

4th Sunday in Lent

Guest Preacher: The Rev. Dr. John Huffman

Psalm 23 is the reading for the OneWord Lenten Series, for use by small groups. Dr. Huffman will be preaching on another scripture passage.

NRSV

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

The Message

God, my shepherd! I don't need a thing. You have bedded me down in lush meadows, you find me quiet pools to drink from. True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction. Even when the way goes through Death Valley, I'm not afraid when you walk at my side. Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure. You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies. You revive my drooping head; my cup brims with blessing. Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life. I'm back home in the house of God for the rest of my life.

For Conversation and Contemplation

This Psalm is the most well known and often quoted passages in Holy Scripture, and it offers a wonderful sense of assurance for believers to be sustained through the best and worst of times. There is an interesting phrase in verse 3 which is sometimes overlooked, that gives some indication of why the LORD provides through the high and low moments of life: "...for his name's sake."

Another way to read that phrase is, “it’s God’s very character” or “it’s just who God is” to lead me in right paths. Have you ever thought about the fact that God’s character shapes your life for the good? What would your life look like if God’s character were not as it is?

Notes

April 6

5th Sunday in Lent

Choir Masterwork/Orchestra

Psalm 130

NRSV

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered. I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning. O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

The Message

Help, God—the bottom has fallen out of my life! Master, hear my cry for help! Listen hard! Open your ears! Listen to my cries for mercy. If you, God, kept records on wrongdoings, who would stand a chance? As it turns out, forgiveness is your habit, and that's why you're worshiped. I pray to God—my life a prayer—and wait for what he'll say and do. My life's on the line before God, my Lord, waiting and watching till morning, waiting and watching till morning. O Israel, wait and watch for God— with God's arrival comes love, with God's arrival comes generous redemption. No doubt about it—he'll redeem Israel, buy back Israel from captivity to sin.

For Conversation and Contemplation

Verses 5-6 express the Psalmist's desire to wait for the LORD, although it might not be entirely clear why. We don't know exactly what troubles the Psalmist was seeking deliverance from, but he seemed to know that the LORD would deliver him if he was patient. It only makes sense to be patient if we know that our patience will be rewarded. Verse 7 says, "For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem." Do you think God is worth the wait? Every wonder if he really was?

Notes

April 13

Passion/Palm Sunday

Psalm 31:9-16

“I Trust in You”

NRSV

Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away. I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors, an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me. I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel. For I hear the whispering of many—terror all around!—as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life. But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, “You are my God.” My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

The Message

I hate all this silly religion, but you, God, I trust. I’m leaping and singing in the circle of your love; you saw my pain, you disarmed my tormentors, You didn’t leave me in their clutches but gave me room to breathe. Be kind to me, God— I’m in deep, deep trouble again. I’ve cried my eyes out; I feel hollow inside. My life leaks away, groan by groan; my years fade out in sighs. My troubles have worn me out, turned my bones to powder. To my enemies I’m a monster; I’m ridiculed by the neighbors. My friends are horrified; they cross the street to avoid me. They want to blot me from memory, forget me like a corpse in a grave, discard me like a broken dish in the trash. The street-talk gossip has me “criminally insane”! Behind locked doors they plot how to ruin me for good. Desperate, I throw myself on you: you are my God! Hour by hour I place my days in your hand, safe from the hands out to get me.

Warm me, your servant, with a smile; save me because you love me. Don't embarrass me by not showing up; I've given you plenty of notice. Embarrass the wicked, stand them up, leave them stupidly shaking their heads as they drift down to hell. Gag those loudmouthed liars who heckle me, your follower, with jeers and catcalls.

For Conversation and Contemplation

Have you ever dealt with an adversary? Have you ever experienced someone's words or actions as completely against you? In such a moment you may have felt completely spent, or as if the things you had given your life to were broken or wasted. Of course, these are the moments when faith and trust comes in to play, and when the genuineness of your relationship with God is revealed. Have you ever faced such a moment, and asked yourself, "Who is my God?"

Notes

April 20

Resurrection of the Lord/Easter

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24, Matthew 28:1-10

“Open the Gates”

NRSV

Psalm 118: 1-2,14-24

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever! Let Israel say, “His steadfast love endures forever.” The Lord is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.

There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous: “The right hand of the Lord does valiantly; the right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord does valiantly.”

I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord. The Lord has punished me severely, but he did not give me over to death.

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.

I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Matthew 28:1-10

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead

men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

The Message

Psalm 118: 1-2,14-24

Thank God because he's good, because his love never quits.

Tell the world, Israel, "His love never quits."

Pushed to the wall, I called to God; from the wide open spaces, he answered. God's now at my side and I'm not afraid; who would dare lay a hand on me? God's my strong champion; I flick off my enemies like flies.

Far better to take refuge in God than trust in people;

Far better to take refuge in God than trust in celebrities.

Hemmed in by barbarians, in God's name I rubbed their faces in the dirt;

Hemmed in and with no way out, in God's name I rubbed their faces in the dirt;

Like swarming bees, like wild prairie fire, they hemmed me in;
in God's name I rubbed their faces in the dirt.

I was right on the cliff-edge, ready to fall, when God grabbed and held me. God's my strength, he's also my song, and now he's my salvation. Hear the shouts, hear the triumph songs in the camp of the saved?

The hand of God has turned the tide!
The hand of God is raised in victory!
The hand of God has turned the tide!"

I didn't die. I lived! And now I'm telling the world what God did. God tested me, he pushed me hard, but he didn't hand me over to Death.

Swing wide the city gates—the righteous gates! I'll walk right through and thank God!

This Temple Gate belongs to God, so the victors can enter and praise.

Thank you for responding to me; you've truly become my salvation!

The stone the masons discarded as flawed is now the capstone!
This is God's work. We rub our eyes—we can hardly believe it!

This is the very day God acted—let's celebrate and be festive!
Salvation now, God. Salvation now! Oh yes, God—a free and full life!

Matthew 28:1-10

After the Sabbath, as the first light of the new week dawned, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to keep vigil at the tomb. Suddenly the earth reeled and rocked under their feet as God's angel came down from heaven, came right up to where they were standing. He rolled back the stone and then sat on it. Shafts of lightning blazed from him. His garments shimmered

snow-white. The guards at the tomb were scared to death. They were so frightened, they couldn't move.

The angel spoke to the women: "There is nothing to fear here. I know you're looking for Jesus, the One they nailed to the cross. He is not here. He was raised, just as he said. Come and look at the place where he was placed.

"Now, get on your way quickly and tell his disciples, 'He is risen from the dead. He is going on ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there.' That's the message."

The women, deep in wonder and full of joy, lost no time in leaving the tomb. They ran to tell the disciples. Then Jesus met them, stopping them in their tracks. "Good morning!" he said. They fell to their knees, embraced his feet, and worshiped him. Jesus said, "You're holding on to me for dear life! Don't be frightened like that. Go tell my brothers that they are to go to Galilee, and that I'll meet them there."

For Conversation and Contemplation

When you consider Christ's resurrection, do you consider it a victory for you personally? Is this any more than a story to encourage you—any more than a myth among others intended to comfort you as you face the harsh reality of death? Psalm 118: 20 reads, "This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it." What is the gate of the LORD? Will you pass through the gate, and in what sense have you been made righteous through your faith in Christ?

Notes

