

Wednesday, April 15, 2020

Daily Lectionary Passages:

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Joshua 3:1-17 &
Matthew 28:1-10

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 (NRSV)

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.



Thought:

Psalm 118 is the final hymn of the Hallel, the hymns Jesus would have sung after the Passover meal. This could have been the last words Jesus sang before he entered the garden to pray. As the Psalm comes to an end, there are two images referring to Jesus. In John 10, Jesus said, “I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved.” Most would have sung this hymn as they were in Jerusalem, and the gates would have been thought as the gates to the holy city. Jesus used this image and said, “I am the gate, through me the righteous shall enter salvation.”

A second image used in the New Testament to describe Jesus is “the stone that the builders rejected” (Acts 4:11). Because of the translation, we often think Jesus was a wood carpenter. Most scholars think Jesus was a stone mason. Joseph would have taught Jesus while working on building Herod’s palace. All Jews would have known the importance of the cornerstone. It was important that this stone was laid perfect. The entire building found its stability in this stone. Our faith is built upon Jesus as the cornerstone of our life.

Joshua 3:1-17 (NRSV)

Early in the morning Joshua rose and set out from Shittim with all the Israelites, and they came to the Jordan. They camped there before crossing over. At the end of three days the officers went through the camp and commanded the people, “When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God being carried by the levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place. Follow it, so that you may know the way you should go, for you have not passed this way before. Yet there shall be a space between you and it, a distance of about two thousand cubits; do not come any nearer to it.” Then Joshua said to the people, “Sanctify yourselves; for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.” To the priests Joshua said, “Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass on in front of the people.” So they took up the ark of the covenant and went in front of the people.

The Lord said to Joshua, “This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses. You are the one who shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, ‘When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.’” Joshua then said to the Israelites, “Draw near and hear the words of the Lord your God.” Joshua said, “By this you shall know that among you is the living God who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites: the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is going to pass before you into the Jordan. So now select twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan flowing from above shall be cut off; they shall stand in a single heap.”

When the people set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan, the priests bearing the ark of the covenant were in front of the people. Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho. While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.

Thought:

After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites are coming into the Promised Land. As the ark of the covenant enters the river, the flood waters stopped. As their parents and grandparents crossed the Red Sea, now the nation of Israel is coming into the land God had prepared for them. Like the people then, we are a bit amazed at the power of God, almost to the point of disbelief. I often miss the opening words of this miracle, “Follow it (the ark), so that you may know the way you should go, for you have not passed this way before.”

We have not been this way before. It is easy to get comfortable in our daily lives. After three weeks, we have even learned a new pattern to shelter at home. We get complacent, and think we know where we are going. The crossing of the Jordan reminds us to keep our eyes on the covenant God has made with us. With Israel, it was in the ark of the covenant. The ark contained the Law given to Moses, a jar of manna and Aaron’s rod. It represented that God was with them, and God would continue to show His mercy on His people. As followers of Jesus, we are to keep our eyes on Jesus (and on His word found in Scripture) the one who leads us in the way of salvation. Who leads us where we have never gone before.

Matthew 28:1-10 (NRSV)

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.”

Thought:

Twice in this passage, we are told “do not be afraid.” There are reasons to be afraid. On that first Easter, there was fear of being arrested. There was fear of what the resurrection meant. There was fear that all had fled and left Jesus to die alone. There was fear of being a sinner. Yet, the messenger of God and Jesus himself said, “Do not be afraid.” We are to not be afraid for a couple of reasons. First, Jesus does not look at the past. We are forgiven. Jesus said, “go tell my brothers.” He called the disciples hiding behind locked doors his brothers. He calls us his brothers and sisters when we do his will. Second, we are told that he is going ahead of us and we will see him. As in the Joshua passage, we are called to keep our eyes on Jesus. He is going before us showing us how to live. When we follow him as his disciples, we pay attention to the way he lived, and model our lives after him.

All too often, we look in the wrong places. They were coming to an empty tomb. Jesus calls us to look ahead, look where He is and where he is leading us.

Prayer:

Guiding Lord, show us the way you want us to go. May we keep our eyes on you, the author and perfecter of our faith. You have promised to be with us and show your mercy upon us. May we live in faith, trusting and following you. Shape us into your people. We place those things we fear before you. Give us faith and hope in you. We have never been this way before, we need you as our guide.

Almighty God, we pray for first responders, police officers, firefighters, nurses and doctors. Give them the energy and wisdom during this time. We pray for the men and women who are working away from home, especially those in the military that are working so that we may have freedom. May we use our freedom to worship and serve you.

(Spend time in silent prayer, praying for those you know. Name them before God and place them in God’s loving arms).

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.