

Monday, May 11, 2020

Daily Lectionary Passages:

Psalm 102:1-17; Exodus 13:17-22 & Acts 7:17-40

Psalm 102:1-17 (NRSV)

Hear my prayer, O Lord;
let my cry come to you.
Do not hide your face from me
in the day of my distress.
Incline your ear to me;
answer me speedily in the day when I call.
For my days pass away like smoke,
and my bones burn like a furnace.
My heart is stricken and withered like grass;
I am too wasted to eat my bread.
Because of my loud groaning
my bones cling to my skin.
I am like an owl of the wilderness,
like a little owl of the waste places.
I lie awake;
I am like a lonely bird on the housetop.
All day long my enemies taunt me;
those who deride me use my name for a curse.
For I eat ashes like bread,
and mingle tears with my drink,
because of your indignation and anger;
for you have lifted me up and thrown me aside.
My days are like an evening shadow;
I wither away like grass.
But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever;
your name endures to all generations.
You will rise up and have compassion on Zion,
for it is time to favor it;
the appointed time has come.
For your servants hold its stones dear,
and have pity on its dust.
The nations will fear the name of the Lord,
and all the kings of the earth your glory.
For the Lord will build up Zion;
he will appear in his glory.
He will regard the prayer of the destitute,
and will not despise their prayer.



Thought:

Many psalms speak of suffering caused by personal sin. We often think of personal faith and personal consequences. We turn to the bible as what it says to the individual. Psalm 102 addresses corporate consequences and actions. It was probably written while the Israelites were in Babylonian exile. The nation is paying the price for not following God. Even faithful

individuals are suffering for the sins of the nation. Jeremiah, Ezekiel and other faithful prophets were carried off into exile.

There is great suffering in this passage. He is eating ashes as if it is bread. There is no bread to eat. His bones are showing through his skin. He is poor and hungry. The time of exile is a time of distress for the nation. The person does not write of personal confession, yet turns to God in faith knowing God will hear his cry. Even in the midst of dark times, God is faithful and will hear the prayers of His people.

Exodus 13:17-22 (NRSV)

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was nearer; for God thought, "If the people face war, they may change their minds and return to Egypt." So God led the people by the roundabout way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of the land of Egypt prepared for battle. And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph who had required a solemn oath of the Israelites, saying, "God will surely take notice of you, and then you must carry my bones with you from here." They set out from Succoth, and camped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

Thought:

We often hear, if only I could see God, I would believe. For forty years, God would lead the people by fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. The people had a visible witness that God was in their midst. Even so, the people did not always trust God. When they came out, we are told they were prepared for battle. They thought they were ready to fight for their freedom. Yet, God knew that they were not yet ready. He took them away from the Philistines. He took them away from war. He took them into the wilderness for a time that they could learn to trust in the Lord. Often when they came upon a test, their faith failed them.

When someone becomes a new believer, they experience the freedom of salvation for the first time. They think they are ready to battle any war for the Lord. Yet, it is a time for wilderness time. A time to wander in the presence of God, learning to trust Him by day and by night. And as they wander, remember the promises God already fulfilled. The one thing they took with them was the bones of Joseph. Those bones signified a promise Israel had made when they came into Egypt. It also signified that God was present with Israel during the famine generations ago. As young believers, or mature followers of Jesus Christ, we need to remember God's faithfulness in the past as we enter the wilderness of the future.

Acts 7:17-40 (NRSV)

"But as the time drew near for the fulfillment of the promise that God had made to Abraham, our people in Egypt increased and multiplied until another king who had not known Joseph ruled over Egypt. He dealt craftily with our race and forced our ancestors to abandon their infants so that they would die. At this time Moses was born, and he was beautiful before God. For three months he was brought up in his father's house; and when he was abandoned, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. So Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in his words and deeds.

"When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his relatives, the Israelites. When he saw one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. He supposed that his kinsfolk would understand that God through him was rescuing them, but they did not understand. The next day he came to some of them as

they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you wrong each other?’ But the man who was wronging his neighbor pushed Moses aside, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ When he heard this, Moses fled and became a resident alien in the land of Midian. There he became the father of two sons.

“Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning bush. When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight; and as he approached to look, there came the voice of the Lord: ‘I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ Moses began to tremble and did not dare to look. Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have surely seen the mistreatment of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to rescue them. Come now, I will send you to Egypt.’

“It was this Moses whom they rejected when they said, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ and whom God now sent as both ruler and liberator through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. He led them out, having performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for forty years. This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up a prophet for you from your own people as he raised me up.’ He is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living oracles to give to us. Our ancestors were unwilling to obey him; instead, they pushed him aside, and in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron, ‘Make gods for us who will lead the way for us; as for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him.’

Thought:

Stephen continues his defense while on trial for following Jesus by continuing their story. Moses is the center of their faith. When Israel went into exile, it was a punishment for not following the law of Moses. When they returned, they built a strong religious practice of following the law. If they followed Moses, they would not face exile or punishment again. They saw it as a direct correlation. So, it is Moses that Stephen focused on. Moses was 80 years old when he came to free the Israelites from the bondage of slavery.

Those in slavery had rejected Moses forty years before. And, when he returned, the people quickly rejected him when Pharaoh did not immediately release them from slavery. Moses did come as the greatest ruler and judge over Israel as he was the one who brought them out of slavery and led them for 40 years. Moses was God’s leader in their presence.

Now, Stephen was telling the Jewish leaders that they are not listening to Moses. Moses had told them God would send a prophet for the people. This prophet is the one who spoke to Moses in the burning bush. This prophet is the one who gave the law to the people. Jesus is the word of God, so Jesus was the one who spoke to Moses. At that time, the people were having Aaron build the golden calf and rejected the word of God. Now, Stephen was telling the leaders they are rejecting God’s prophet, God’s word again.

Prayer:

Almighty God, we enter another week of wondering when life will return to normal. When will we be able to move about with the freedoms we are so used to? We get glimpses of your presence in our lives, yet the struggles around us seem so overwhelming. Give us faith to see you guiding us, not just as a pillar of clouds by day or fire by night, but your Spirit present within us. May He guide us to follow you this day and this week. May we see your freedom to live as salvation people.

We pray for our homes, our neighbors, our community, our nation, your world. We give you thanks for all mothers who nurture love of your nae. May you give your spirit of wisdom to all leaders.

(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.