

THE CHURCH REMEMBERS THE COMFORT OF HER LORD

Hear the Word of God for this *Reminiscere* Sunday, as the Church remembers the comfort of her Lord this feast-day which breaks into the 40-day countdown to the Resurrection of our Lord:

YHWH will keep you,
from all evil He will keep your soul.¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

For centuries, this has been the Sunday in the Church Year to call upon God to remember His tender mercies and loving-kindnesses. We do so with the prayer that our enemies may not triumph over us, and that God would continue to deliver His people out of all their troubles. In essence, it is a day to remember that God will deliver us from all evil. It is good, after a week and a half of fasting (not counting today and last Sunday) that the people of God remember that it is God's nature to show mercy and steadfast love to us. That is true even if we are suffering on account of our sins or the sinfulness of this world.

We today, though, following our practice since 2006, had the Pastor (and Deacon) enter the Chancel during the speaking of the 121st Psalm on this particular Sunday. It is the Psalm of the week. The words we responsively read today in the place of the Introit (which you may hear on Wednesday evening) still fit with its theme of calling upon God in remembrance. Today, as part of offering the Word of God as the sacrifice of prayer that God would remember His mercies, we read God's Word as a reminder to each and all of us that God is truly our help. Hear the beginning words of the Psalm of the week:

(A) song for ascending in steps (gradual):
*I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from whence comes my help?*²

¹ Psalm 121:7.

² Psalm 121:1.

Our bulletins do not record the first line of the quote you just heard. That is due to the reality that it was likely added later, after the Psalm had been inspired. Those who added the words were not trying to add to the Word of God, a caution we have heard here repeated quite frequently. Rather, it appears that the header text was inserted during the times when the Temple of the Lord stood on Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Today's Psalm, along with the others from 120 -134, would have been sung as part of the journey the faithful would take to attend the feasts in Jerusalem in which the Lord required all males to partake.³ Therefore, the 121st Psalm would have been sung or chanted by the faithful in their travels to participate in the Feast of Unleavened Bread. According to our calendar this year that Feast will coincide with our remembrance of the Lord's mercy and loving-kindness during Holy Week.

So, just like the faithful of old who had a long journey to take before entering into the House of the Lord, so we who have 30 days left in Lent to travel before entering into the Feast of the Resurrection also have today's song of ascents, or, for better understanding, our Psalm of steps. By that, I mean to indicate that this text, which marks the second of the 15 so-called, "pilgrimage" Psalms, stands apart from them. It appears to indicate a gradual ascent, in four parts, of one who is standing afar, at a fixed place, and gazing up to the Temple of the Lord.

To give you an idea of the scale of distance which may have been involved in the human's mind as he composed today's Psalm, consider these similarities. Oro Valley is situated at about the same altitude as Jerusalem. Catalina Lutheran Church is situated some 600 feet above Oro Valley. If you were able to have a clear view of this building from Noble Hops, you would get some idea of the scale of view someone might have had if he had a clear view from Mount Gilboa in the North of Israel looking South to the Temple of Jerusalem. Suffice it to say, if you were stuck in Oro Valley in Lent, having made a vow to give up beer during the fast days (a challenge for tomorrow's mythical

³ Cf. *Exodus* 23:17 and preceding.

feast of the Irish), you might have some appreciation of how a pilgrim who had left his home and given up fermented beverages might have felt. Or not! Back to our Psalm:

*I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from whence comes my help?⁴
My help (comes) from YHWH, (the One) making (the) heavens and earth.⁵*

Here we have a question and answer of any person of the Faith, who beholding a distance to travel to be in the Presence of God, may feel a bit overwhelmed. This Psalm is actually for each of us to remember regularly (as we do each second Sunday in, but not of, Lent). It is for you and I, and all those of the faith, who are on a journey in this life to the day, hour, and minute when we will each see the Lord face-to-Face.

Not one of us knows how genuinely long or short, in terms of human measurements of time, it will be before we each stand before God. At times, it seems the mountains and hills of this life block our view of the eternal goal. Such things as worries, the death of a marriage, the loss of a job, a loved one's falling asleep in the Lord – these and so much more – seem to be insurmountable obstacles. We are given to anticipate the eternal peace and each time we hear the Words of the Benedictions which conclude our Lord's Services to us, yet, we sin and doubt God's keeping us from all evil. So, with the Psalmist, we each may say when facing such worldly things blocking our remaining in the loving-kindness of our Lord:

I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from whence comes my help?⁶

Then, from the Faith we have been given, from the Word of God planted deep in each of us, we recall the answer to our yearning, longing desires to remain in the blessed peace of our Lord:

My help (comes) from YHWH, (the One) making (the) heavens and earth.⁷

⁴ Psalm 121:1.

⁵ Psalm 121:2.

⁶ Psalm 121:1.

⁷ Psalm 121:2.

When we, when you, are troubled by the mountains and hills of this life, like the Psalmist, you too, are free to lift up your eyes to behold His creation. He who created all the good that you may behold is still working, sustaining both heavens and earth for your benefit. When you doubt God's Presence in your life, when you realize that is sin, you are able to look up, and see God's grace and mercy in the creation. From that, through the Word implanted in you, the Holy Spirit will move you to prayer, praise, and thanksgivings, based upon texts such as these:

*Surely He will not let your foot be tottering;
He will slumber not, (the) One keeping you.⁸
Behold, the One keeping Israel will not slumber and He will not sleep.⁹*

For anyone ascending the hills or mountains to a place of solitude, it is important to have sure footing. The Psalmist reminds us, God reminds you, that when mountains of trouble are before you, God will protect you. He will steady your feet on the path to the heavenly Temple, through the place where heaven meets earth in the Presence of the Lord.

Even if your trials in the faith come in the middle of the night, God who does not slumber nor sleep in His watchfulness over you. He will protect you. God will be there in His baptism of you. He will recall to your mind that you have already died to sin and all its mountains of temptation and falling, and that He has raised you up in Christ Jesus to stand before Him. The Psalmist, in the text, heaps up reminders of God's gracious, loving, and steadfast mercy for us who seem to be stuck in place on the path which leads to His Presence. That text continues with lines we desert-dwellers can understand:

*YHWH (is) your Keeper,
YHWH (is) your shade upon your right hand.¹⁰
By day the sun not will smite you,
(nor the) moon by night.¹¹*

⁸ Psalm 121:3.

⁹ Psalm 121:4.

¹⁰ Psalm 121:5.

¹¹ Psalm 121:6.

It has been said that you can tell who has lived it Tucson more than a few summers. We can take a mile to walk a block, as we go from shade to shade in the general direction of our travels. Such is the imagery of the Psalm, that God is the shade in which we remain in the heat of the day, as the sun appears at its zenith and then heads into the West. Unlike other parts of this country, in the Southwest the heat just keeps increasing until just before sunset. So, God Who is first called our Keeper, that is the One taking care of us and His beloved children, is as shade in the heat of the day.

Now, whether the Psalmist is looking southward, putting the rays of the sun on his right hand, or not, he does behold the Lord as being in the highest position of honor. We know this because, in part, the emphasis in the construction of the words of the Psalm is placed upon the Name of God and the right hand. From that holy place, our Keeper watches over us, protecting us from the heat of the evil arrayed against His people. In addition to all that, the Psalm declares:

*By day the sun not will smite you,
(nor the) moon by night.*¹²

The imagery of God's protection of those who call upon Him moves to the night at the end of the verse. A lot of speculation in commentaries and study Bibles has been done regarding the end of that verse. Suffice it to say, we don't know the exact thoughts of the Psalmist in recording these words: *(nor the) moon by night*. It is my opinion, rather than trying to trump up some unknown fear the ancient Hebrews might have held regarding moonlight—ending with vampires or zombies or werewolves or some such—the meaning of the night reference appears simple. That the moonlight is connected to the sunlight conveys the message that God our Keeper is watching over us day and night. That thought surely fits with the declaration of the very wakeful God declared earlier in the Psalm, and ties it to these words:

*YHWH will keep you,
from all evil He will keep your soul.*¹³

¹² Psalm 121:6.

*YHWH will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and into eternity.*¹⁴

That, dear fellow-redeemed, is the message of comfort we are given to remember by the Word of God as this second week of the Lenten season begins at sundown today. It is a message Jacob could have used as he went to meet his brother whom he feared. It is the consolation of God that the Canaanite woman surely believed in. Though as a non-Jewess, she likely did not know today's Psalm as she asked God-in-our-flesh to remove the demon from her daughter. The comfort of the Psalm is that which first gave the recipients of the Letter to the Thessalonians the power of God to resist falling into sexual immorality. Its good news is also given that they may have repented and turned from their sins when they fell into temptation. These words, then, are for all believers in the Word of God, in Jesus our Savior, whenever we are faced, day or night, with the burning or freezing temptations that are the lot of our fallen natures:

*YHWH will keep you,
from all evil He will keep your soul.*¹⁵

You know those words are true, for you have heard the message of Jesus' conquering temptation for you as last Sunday's Gospel reading broke into the Lenten fast. The ancient sermon-series drawn from that which we call the Lectionary ties such thoughts together. The same Lord Who kept Jesus faithful keeps you faithful in Him.

When you doubt that, look to the cross with the image of your Savior dying in your sins. Behold His faithfulness in bringing you forgiveness, while, in time, delivering you from the evil one. Know that, even as you pray these words, "but deliver us from evil," that God has heard your petitions. In Christ, you have been truly rescued from every evil of body and soul. In the Promise of the Psalm, you are free to confess,

¹³ Psalm 121:7.

¹⁴ Psalm 121:8.

¹⁵ Psalm 121:7.

know, and believe that, when your last hour shall come, God will give you a blessed end, and graciously take you from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.¹⁶

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Lent II, *Reminiscere* (LSB One-year series)

Psalm 121; Genesis 32:2-32; I Thessalonians 4:1-7; Matthew 15:21-28

March 16, 2014

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria

¹⁶ *Dr. Luther's Small Catechism*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986, 22.

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²³ Psalm 121:7.

²⁴ Psalm 121:8.