

RECEIVE COMFORT: GOD HEARS THE PRAYER OF THOSE WHO TRUST IN HIM

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church:

*O YHWH Elohim Sabaoth, hear my prayer;
cause to give ear, O Elohe of Jacob. Selah. ¹*

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

Today's Psalm is one of comfort that is received as the one chanting, singing and thereby praying it in faith, grasps the truths it reveals. They are heard in the Word's revelation that God hears the prayer of those who trust in Him. That hope was placed into our ears today by the most intense line of declaration of Who the True God is that is proclaimed from the 84th Psalm:

*O YHWH Elohim Sabaoth, hear my prayer;
cause to give ear, O Elohe of Jacob. Selah. ²*

For a person chanting or simply hearing that line, for you we pray, the Psalm guides one into receiving God-given comfort. That may be found in recalling that God hears the prayer of the faithful. They are those who, in hearing this Word, remember that God looks graciously on His people for the sake of His Anointed Son, as the next Psalm line declares:

*Our Shield behold, O Elohim,
and cause to look upon (the) Face of Your Messiah.³*

The Psalmist's Word reveals that a believer's prayer is heard through the intercession of God's own Christ. It is His Face that the Father beholds continually as your prayers ascend. When the Father looks upon the Son, He beholds Him in enduring love. As you are in the Son, God then beholds you through His sacrificial love.

In divine love Christ, the Messiah, continually stands as the Shield between the pure holiness of the Father, and the still sin-tainted nature that clings to you. The Father beholds the Face of the One Whose visage was once covered in blood as He bore your sins, along with the sins of the whole world, from Pilate's pillory, through the streets of

¹ Psalm 84:9.

² Psalm 84:9.

³ Psalm 84:10.

ancient Jerusalem, onto a cross on a hill outside the city – all depicted here in the Stations of the Cross. He sees in Him the love He displayed as He died to pay the price demanded for the sins of all humans for all time.

That God ever beholds the Face of His Anointed Son on our behalf sets the tone for this week's overall theme led by the Psalm of the week. That moved us to begin to focus, through the Collect Prayer, on God's sowing His Word in our midst, in order to deliver grace, mercy and trust into hearts stained by sin. We prayed that the Holy Spirit's work through that Word would continue to create good hearts within us. Such Word-cleansed centers of the new natures we are given in Christ move us to produce godly fruits of the Faith. Those are God's good gifts that we get to recall in the middle of the Church's annual pre-Lent weeks. In our ears today, the Church's preparation for her responses to God's comforting Word, our offering the New Covenant sacrifices of prayer, praise and thanksgiving began as a translation of this verse was chanted:

*How beloved (are) Your dwelling places, O YHWH Sabaoth!*⁴

Those opening words were, as the superscription to the Psalm indicates, (printed in your bulletin above the chant tone for the day) given to the ancient Church to be chanted or sung. It was, and is, intended to be a laudatory Psalm, along with the eighth and 81st. It appears to have been originally played on a joyous sounding instrument. Like all the Psalms, when used as Introits – entrance chants into the Lord's Services – it was, as it still is, intended to move its hearers into God's Word in joy. That is true whether an opening Psalm communicates joy in happiness, joy in fear, joy in sorrow, or joy in jubilation. Today, Psalm 84 was used to move you to joy in comfort. That is the comfort of hearing, knowing, believing, and responding to the truth that God has sown His good Word within you, that it might bear much fruit.

The Psalm communicates the joy discovered in a faithful person's entering into the places upon earth where God has determined to dwell with His people. In the Old

⁴ Psalm 84:2.

Covenant era, that was in Tabernacle and Temple. In the New Covenant era, that is in the Temple built out of living stones. That is found when two or more believers are gathered around God's Word – visible and proclaimed – as His Messiah is present with them through those simple means. Following the teaching of the Scripture, the Church for almost two millennia has taught that New Covenant Temple of the Lord's Presence is beheld visibly on earth wherever Bishop/Pastor, People and the Lord's Altar Table are gathered together. Consider that as you hear its opening words again:

*How beloved (are) Your dwelling places, O YHWH Sabaoth!*⁵

Today's Psalm is a song, a chant, a prayer that you might use whenever you prepare to come into the Lord's Presence with your brothers and sisters in Christ. It is also a hymn of homecoming for those who have been apart from the Lord's courts for some time. That, dear ones, appears to have been the occasion of its original Spirit-guided composition. It was a song given to chant for those who have been apart from the Lord's places of His Real Presence as they remember their times with Him, and anticipate their return into His dwelling places, as the second line sounds:

*My soul longs, and faints even, for (the) courts of YHWH;
and my heart and my flesh sing for joy to El, El (the) living One.*⁶

In our era of the Church, such sentiment still resounds from the faithful. A bit over 20 years ago, a Midwestern U.S. congregation had a beautiful multi-story neo-Gothic building. It was built over four levels that needed multiple ascents of steps to get to each floor. One could not even enter into the Narthex without ascending some tens of marble steps – imagine doing that with a casket, or with a cane or walker! The voters, after much wrangling, decided to spend a couple hundred thousand dollars to install an elevator. After it was installed, members of the congregation who had not been able to receive God's gifts in the building with their brothers and sisters around Christ's Altar Table were beheld shedding tears of joy as they entered into the Nave for the first time in years.

⁵ Psalm 84:2.

⁶ Psalm 84:3.

(Here, we need only think of the statements made by some of our regular 5 p.m. Divine Service attendees when they were able to attend services here again). Our 60-day Psalm continues from that joyous, hopeful exclamation to picture an earthly reality of the Old Covenant Tabernacle and Temple – God’s dwelling places open to the creatures of the air day and night in the midst of His people:

Even (the) sparrow finds (a) house and (the) swallow (a) nest for her in which she may lay her young at Your altars, O YHWH my King and My Elohe.⁷

(Here we might remember the annual “Church Gecko” which takes up residence around the chancel rails). For a believer separated from God’s Place of Presence with His People, just the memory of the simple creatures that have found a place where he or she cannot be can move one to joyful hope. The Psalm’s image of twittering and peaceful birds (the literal renderings of the Hebrew we translate with sparrow and swallow) moves its hearer to think of safety and security. Those may be found by the forgiven sinner in the immediate vicinity of the Lord’s chosen place where He meets His faithful people.

That word picture leads to two beatitudes to be chanted or sung in remembrance of what it is to be in the Lord’s House. The first ends the first strain of the hymn, the second begins the middle strain. The first:

Blessed (are the) ones living (in) Your house ever singing Your praise. Selah.⁸

That first beatitude is so full of hope in God’s promises that are delivered in His courts to His faithful people. It declares that for which your New Nature yearns each Lord’s Day as it anticipates entering into the Lord’s Presence, among His people, to receive His gifts. It is such a powerful Christian response to our freedom to worship in the Presence of the Living God. It calls us to remember that here we receive grace, mercy, forgiveness and life. Then, our Psalm section ends with a little word that indicates a pause in the singing.

⁷ Psalm 84:4.

⁸ Psalm 84:5.

That pause provides opportunity for you to reflect and ask if all this has been your attitude toward entering again into the Lord's dwelling places. If it is not one of joyful anticipation, you are called to repent. If it is, you are called to give thanks.

From that rest in chanting, the Psalm takes up its second strain. That is the song of the one who believes, knows and lives in the gifts that God gives from His chosen places and means of grace. The second beatitude begins a pilgrim section:

*Blessed (is the) man whose strength (is) in You;
in whose heart (are the) high roads.⁹*

There the faithful chants of the Word that is sown by God in the heart. That Word, taking root, leads to the high roads. Those are the good works done in the Faith. Then the song goes on to declare in wonderful pictures how that Word brings forth fruit:

*As they go in (the) Valley of Baca; (a) place of springs they make it; even
blessings it caused to enwrap, (the) early rain.¹⁰*

There the Psalm chant declares, in worldly images, the change that the seed of the Good Word of God makes in those around the faithful. We, in this part of the country, know well the imagery of the Spring rain and what it produces in the high desert now gone dry for many weeks. Soon after the rain, the desert will bloom again with wildflowers. Just so, the Word, entering into lifeless hearts, brings forth life. In that life, the Psalm chant continues:

For they go in strength unto strength, (each) will be seen to Elohim in Zion.¹¹

That describes the inner strength that comes to the faithful as the Word works deep within them. It implies God's Word building upon His Word in the believer. That one, producing the strong fruits of the Faith will be seen in Christ, before God in His dwelling

⁹ Psalm 84:6.

¹⁰ Psalm 84:7.

¹¹ Psalm 84:8.

on earth – and all terror in His Presence He removes, leaving place for awe, reverence, and respect.

(Think of how you approach the Table of the Lord this day. Your sins have been forgiven. You have been called to attentiveness to the Word. You have received the divine right to approach the Living God. He bends down to touch you – to strengthen you to everlasting life. What respect you give, what reverence you offer, what awe you hold as you receive the gifts of the God of gods, Your Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier)!

That leads to the sound of the most intense line of the Psalm, that which we heard about earlier:

*YHWH Elohim Sabaoth, hear my prayer,
cause to give ear, O Elohe of Jacob. Selah.¹²*

Again, the text marks a pause, with a plucking of strings by the time of the Second Temple, providing a mark for reflection of the pilgrimage one desires to make, even as one makes it, into the place of the Lord's dwelling with His people.

The final section then begins with the reason all believers have hope as they enter into the Real Presence of the Living God:

*Our Shield behold, O Elohim,
and cause to look upon (the) Face of Your Messiah.¹³*

As we heard earlier, that declares the Anointed Son of God Who intercedes with the Father on behalf of all the faithful.

Then, in the hope and Presence of Christ, the chant continues with a good confession of the Faith. Here is reflected that which a soldier experiences when returning home from a deployment; a mother returning from a birth center with her newborn baby; a college student heading home during his or her first break; a shut-in who can again attend the Lord's Divine Services in His courts on earth – Bishop, People and Altar together once again:

For good (is a) day in Your courts (than) (a) thousand (elsewhere);

¹² Psalm 84:9.

¹³ Psalm 84:10.

*I have chosen to stand at the threshold in (the) house of my Elohe,
(rather) than (to) dwell in (the) tents of evil.¹⁴*

Surely you have noticed the sentiment of which the Psalm sings. It is that which a person who has taken a long journey often experiences upon returning home. It is why the same distance traveled home from a vacation spot seems much shorter than the distance crossed to get there. It is why your New Nature rejoices when he beholds the landmarks that show you are nearing His Church building. And, it is why your Old Nature cringes that you passed your favorite recreation spots on your way here! To that, the Psalm responds with the Word that is needed to turn from such sinful thoughts:

*For Sun and Shield (is) YHWH Elohim; favor and glory YHWH bestows;
He withholds no good for the ones walking in uprightness.¹⁵*

There you chanted of the blessings God gives whenever you enter His Presence. They are realized promises you continue to receive whenever you hear and believe in His Messiah, His Anointed One, His Christ Who gave His all for you. That is God's good work of the Faith in you. That work produces a good, and God-pleasing response in you, as this week's Psalm of comfort and praise concludes:

O YHWH Sabaoth, blessed (is the) man (who) trusts in You.¹⁶

That ending chant reinforces the divine reality that today's Psalm brings comfort to one who trusts in Him above all things. Such trust God gives as His Word is proclaimed into the ears of the faithful when it is chanted, sung, and thereby prayed. In that Word, the truth it reveals will be grasped through the Faith of Christ. That means that God truly hears the prayer of one in whom His Word has taken root. His Christ prays that would continue to bear much fruit in and through you!

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

Sexagesima (Lutheran Service Book one-year series)

Psalm 84; Isaiah 55:10-13; II Corinthians 11:19-12:9; Luke 8:4-15

February 4, 2018

¹⁴ Psalm 84:11.

¹⁵ Psalm 84:12.

¹⁶ Psalm 84:13.

Pastor Michael A. Merhouse

Soli Deo Gloria

To (the) choirmaster, upon the lyre, for (the) sons of Korah, (a) Psalm.¹⁷

How beloved (are) Your dwelling places, O YHWH Sabaoth!¹⁸

Longs, and faints even, my soul for (the) courts of YHWH; and my heart and my flesh sing for joy to El, El (the) living One.¹⁹

Even (the) sparrow finds (a) house and (the) swallow (a) nest for her in which she may lay her young at Your altars, O YHWH my King and My Elohe.²⁰

Blessed (are the) ones living (in) Your house forever singing Your praise. Selah.²¹

Blessed (is the) man strength to them in You from (the) high roads in their heart.²²

As they go in (the) Valley of Baca; (a) place of springs they make it; even blessings it caused to enwrap, (the) early rain.²³

For they go in strength upon strength, will be seen El Elohim in Zion.²⁴

YHWH Elohim Sabaoth, hear my prayer, cause to give ear, OElohe of Jacob. Selah. ²⁵

Our shield see, O Elohim, and cause to look upon (the) Face of Your Messiah.²⁶

For good (is a) day in Your courts (than) from (a) thousand; I have chosen to stand at the threshold in (the) house of my Elohe, than (to) dwell in (the) tents of evil.²⁷

For (a) Sun and (a) Shield (is) YHWH Elohim; favor and glory He bestows, YHWH; not He withholds good for the ones walking in uprightness.²⁸

O YHWH Sabaoth, blessed (be the) man (who) trusts in You.²⁹

¹⁷ Psalm 84:1.

¹⁸ Psalm 84:2.

¹⁹ Psalm 84:3.

²⁰ Psalm 84:4.

²¹ Psalm 84:5.

²² Psalm 84:6.

²³ Psalm 84:7.

²⁴ Psalm 84:8.

²⁵ Psalm 84:9.

²⁶ Psalm 84:10.

²⁷ Psalm 84:11.

²⁸ Psalm 84:12.

²⁹ Psalm 84:13.