

Noon

“The 7 Penitential Psalms” – Mid-Week Lent, 2022

The Book of Psalms is the great prayerbook of the church, even as it has always been for the Jewish people. There is truly a psalm for every occasion in life. Over the centuries, seven psalms in particular have been a source of insight and meaning to those in need of repentance, those harassed by sin, those who need to confess their sin and turn to God’s loving mercy for rescue. The church assigns them during Lent as a way to encourage the repentant faithful to pray them. During Lent, we will reflect on these seven psalms as part of our Lenten Discipline.

3/2 – Ash Wednesday –Psalm 51- Of the seven penitential psalms, Psalm 51 is probably the one we are most familiar with. I’m sure as we spoke it together there were several verses that you recognized because they are used in some of the orders of services that we use. The background to this Psalm, the story of King David’s despicable behavior with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah is one that we are familiar with as well.

3/9– The 6th Psalm in the Psalms is attributed to David. Unlike the 51st Psalm that we heard last week where the context is almost certainly that of David’s transgression with Bathsheba and her husband Uriah, the story behind this Psalm is unknown. Personally, I’ve always felt that those Psalms in which the background is unknown makes it all that easier for me to apply it to myself. The backstory to this Psalm, like many, could very well be MY story and yours.

3/16 – Psalm 38 - Needless to say, the 38th Psalm is not the cheeriest psalm in the psalms. It is the psalm of a man who is experiencing great suffering – physically, emotionally and spiritually. And yet as dark it is, this is a psalm that is laced with courageous hope, centered in the Lord. And so it stands as a powerful witness for all believers in Christ of what faith in Christ looks like particularly in times of pain and suffering.

3/23 – Psalm 32 - The 32nd Psalm is attributed to David. The background to this Psalm is not given, but many believe that it was written by David as he reflected on his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband, Uriah. Psalm 32 is closely connected then to Psalm 51 which we considered on Ash Wednesday.

Psalm 32 now, is the recalling of the experience of a man who tried to hide his guilt from others, from himself, and from God – all unsuccessfully. BUT it is also, most importantly, the Psalm of a man who knows the relief and joy of God’s forgiveness for his sin. So this Psalm is both instruction for us to learn from as well as a prayer for us to use – because even if our crime is not like David’s, we all share the same experience of guilt as he describes

3/30 – Psalm 130 The 130th Psalm has sometimes been called the “funeral psalm” because of its poignant expression of deep sorrow. When Luther was asked his opinion on which were the best Psalms, he replied, Psalms 32, 51 and 130 – three of the seven penitential psalms. He called these three the “Pauline psalms” because, like Paul’s epistles, they lay out the realities of the depths of human sin, the abundance of God’s grace, and Christ’s complete redemption.

4/6– Psalm 143 - Weiser says that Psalm 143 portrays is the song of lament of one who prays to God to preserve his endangered life in the face of “outward and inward helplessness.”^[38] Luther accents the helplessness of the one who makes supplication to God. To stand before God is always to be in need and utterly dependent of Him: “The life of a saint is more a taking from God than a giving; more a desiring than a having; more a becoming pious than a being pious” (AE 14:196).

4/15 Good Friday – Psalm 102 - Psalm 102 is the fifth of the seven Penitential Psalms. In this Psalm, we see a dimension to ‘repentance’ that we have not yet seen. Rather than an individual focus on ‘my sin’ and the desire to amend my sinful life and walk with the Lord, here we see a desire for ‘repentance’ that grows out of the weariness and struggle of trying to live by faith in a fallen and sinful world. The Psalmist prays to that the Lord will rescue the nation and the church from its sinful and fallen ways.