

Daily Devotions

July 31 – August 6, 2022

By Rev. Tom Otis, Retired Pastor
Escanaba, MI

This series is based on Psalm 89 from the daily readings for cycle C in the ELW. It is structured on the first 18 verses that summarize the direction of the Psalm. The commentary shows how the later verses of the Psalm give depth to the opening verses.

Sunday, July 31, 2022

Our faith is born of promises. We live out our faith in a chaotic world where survival appears to be the only rule. How can Psalms help us? Modern Christians think that Psalms use language and pictures that do not speak to the events of our world, but they do. Many Psalms give us a process to move through the chaos. We can pour out our doubts, our anger, our fears, and be renewed by God. This week I would like to use the process of Psalm 89 to do some spiritual work together. The text for each day is woven into the comments and the prayer is often a verse from the Psalm as well.

Psalm 89:1-2: **I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.**

We hear the Word of God proclaimed as a living word. It is an ancient word, but in the Sunday worship proclamation it becomes a word to us and for us. **God makes promises:** *“I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips” (v. 34).* God even doubles down: *“Once and for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His line shall continue forever, and his throne endure before me like the sun. It shall be established forever like the moon, an enduring witness in the skies” (vs. 35-37).* That is pretty clear. **God makes promises.** Clear your mind and pray in the words of the Psalm. You may want to pray these verses more than once. Let them soak in.

PRAYER: “I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens. Amen.” (Psalm 89:1-2)

Monday, August 1, 2022

On Sunday God declares the reliability of God’s Word and we sing, “Yes! Yes! We believe you.” But do we take it personally? God is speaking to us as a descendant of David through Jesus. A second century church elder taught that when we pray the Psalms we speak about Jesus, the descendant of David, in words that are the voice of Jesus, himself the Word of God, and add our own voice standing along-side Jesus speaking these words into being through Jesus for our place and time. In Jesus you are also a chosen one. All of that complex run-on sentence to say Jesus and the Psalmist speak with one voice and invite you to join them. Can you identify with the descendant of David who speaks this psalm with Jesus?

Psalm 89:3: **You [God] said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant David:”**

In the Body of the Psalm, God again doubles down. *“Then you spoke in a vision to your faithful one and said: ‘I have set the crown on one who is mighty, I have exalted one chosen from the people’” (vs.19).* God spells it out. *“I have found my servant David; with my holy oil I have*

anointed him; my hand shall always remain with him; my arm also shall strengthen him” (vss. 20-21).

Then come the **gifts** that accompany God’s promise: *“The enemy shall not outwit him, the wicked shall not humble him” (vs. 22).* God gives **wisdom** and words. *“I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him” (vs. 23).* God gives **protection**. *“My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him; and in my name his horn shall be exalted” (vs. 24).* God gives **confidence**. The extravagant promises literally overflow as God says it again and again: *“I will establish your descendants forever and build your throne for all generations (vs.4). I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. Forever I will keep my steadfast love for him, and my covenant with him will stand firm. I will establish his line forever, and his throne as long as the heavens endure” (vss. 27-29).*

God piles all that extravagant love on you!

PRAYER: God, you have called me in my baptism. Help me to receive your gifts of strength and wisdom and right words and protection and confidence that overflow from your steadfast love.

Jesus, help me to hear what you are saying to me in this Psalm and what you want me to say with you. AMEN.

Tuesday, August 2, 2022

As we pray this Psalm with Jesus, our head is swirling with the wonder of God’s extravagance. This is not a day to analyze. This is a day to let the very wonder of God pour out from within us. “God, you are so Awesome!”

Psalm 89:5-8: **“Let the heavens praise your wonders, O Lord, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones. For who in the skies can be compared to the Lord? Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord, a God feared in the council of the holy ones, great and awesome above all that are around him? O Lord God of hosts, who is as mighty as you, O Lord? Your faithfulness surrounds you.”**

From deep inside we simply say it. Speaking out gives us confidence and helps us to believe. For there are days ahead when we will need to believe, trust and cling to God.

PRAYER: God, indeed there is none like you, your name is all that needs be said. You are Awesome! Amen.

Wednesday, August 3, 2022

Believing leads to confession. We see God everywhere:

Psalm 89:9-12: **“You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them. The heavens are yours, the earth also is yours; the world and all that is in it—you have founded them. The north and the south—you created them; Tabor and Hermon joyously praise your name.”**

Have you yet discovered that when you speak a truth about God your words come back to you with authority and responsibility? We say something true about God and God says, “Yes, and I made you to live out your words in the stewardship of your actions.” *“I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers. He shall cry to me, ‘You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!’” (vss. 25-26).*

When God “sets our hand upon something,” that is Bible-speak for “you are responsible for this now.” In this case, living with so much water all around us in the U.P., the stewardship of lakes

and rivers seems like this Psalm was written for us. Those of you who know me know I have a sailboat. There have been times when I have been in large crashing waves and overcast skies far from shore. In those times this prayer means even more to me. In your life, what parts of life are you responsible for where life can feel like stormy seas? Do you know what it is to cling to God as the Rock of your salvation? You may want to say this short prayer more than once and carry it with you all day.

PRAYER: God, "You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!" Amen.

Thursday, August 4, 2022

As baptized people we experience life and creation differently. We see God in it. We also see the chaos, unfaithfulness, corruption, and brokenness. We see the need for God's justice and mercy. Unfortunately, we seldom see God's justice applied in the world the way we think it should. When we try to act in faith as God's servant, we can experience judgement of our shortcomings almost painfully. It has always been a curiosity to me. Do we judge others because one of our failings is to always think the "other guy" isn't getting what they deserve? Or is it because we want so much to please God that we see God targeting our imperfections and failures? This questioning is your entry to the next part of this psalm.

Psalm 89:13-14: **"You have a mighty arm; strong is your hand, high your right hand. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you."**

God speaks to us out of love as a parent. I hated it when my parents disciplined me and when I rebelled, they had to administer punishment. As a parent I learned how painful but necessary discipline is and how I truly hated administering the punishment. I think it teaches us something about God when we say, "This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you." *"If the children [of my anointed] forsake my law and do not walk according to my ordinances, if they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments, then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with scourges;" (vss. 30-32).* Yet even in that painful moment there is still the promise: *"but I will not remove from him my steadfast love, or be false to my faithfulness" (vs. 33).*

Locked in our pain, we do not feel God's justice is all that just, or that God's love is all that steadfast. Remember the Psalmist is speaking for himself but also for the descendants of the anointed. Can you imagine you are saying these words with Jesus? Here the Psalmist speaks in the third person. Can you relate to these words of the Psalmist?

"But now you have spurned and rejected him; you are full of wrath against your anointed. You have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown in the dust. You have broken through all his walls; you have laid his strongholds in ruins. All who pass by plunder him; he has become the scorn of his neighbors. You have exalted the right hand of his foes; you have made all his enemies rejoice. Moreover, you have turned back the edge of his sword, and you have not supported him in battle. You have removed the scepter from his hand and hurled his throne to the ground. You have cut short the days of his youth; you have covered him with shame" (vss. 38-45).

Wow! That is what it feels like to be rejected, humiliated, and even abandoned by God. Can we pray this line in really difficult times? Can we complain and still cling to God?

PRAYER: God, "You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!" Amen.

Friday, August 5, 2022

This is going to be a long stretch of Scripture today. It is the moment when we can't hold it in anymore. Up to now we have been reminding God and more importantly reminding ourselves just who God is, what God promises and God's commitment to justice. Okay, now we let God know how we expect this justice to come out in our favor, what we expect. We really let God have it. As uncomfortable as it can make some of us feel, Scripture is filled with God's servants making demands of God. People reacting to the pressure of the moment and "letting God have it."

Psalm 89:15-16, 46: **Happy are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O Lord, in the light of your countenance; they exult in your name all day long, and extol your righteousness. How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself? ... Forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire?"**

Hey, God! You know who we are, we are the people who worship you, who walk, O Lord, in the light of your countenance; WE exult in your name all day long and extol your righteousness. We are YOUR people, and we NEED you! I am going to use a lot of "all caps" to emphasize what we are thinking and how desperate and how mad we are at God in this passage. Read it with real passion in your voice:

"HOW LONG, O Lord? Will you HIDE yourself forever? HOW LONG will your wrath burn like fire? Remember HOW SHORT my time is—for what vanity you have created all mortals! Who can live and never see death? Who can ESCAPE the power of Sheol? Lord, WHERE IS your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness YOU SWORE to David? REMEMBER, O Lord, how your servant is taunted; how I BEAR in my bosom the INSULTS of the peoples, with which your enemies TAUNT, O Lord, with which they taunted the footsteps of YOUR anointed" (vss. 46-51).

To understand how a Psalm like this works, you really need to stop at this point and listen for the voice of God. Hear God say to you, "Well, I am certainly glad you got that off your chest. I know your frustration and you can unload it on me any time, because I am still with you and will always be."

PRAYER: How long, O Lord? I need you and it feels like you will hide yourself forever. How long will I feel your anger burning against me? But God I rely on you. "You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!" Amen.

Saturday, August 6, 2022

After "letting God have it," we return to the beginning. God is faithful and his promises are sure. In the end, no matter how hopeless our current situation, no matter how afraid we are and how angry with God, God is with us before, in the midst and to the end. We can let God know we are angry, embarrassed, even disappointed, but in the end God is still God and will be with us and even for us. After the catharsis comes the peace. We can praise God for the blessings we have received.

Psalm 89:17-18, 52: **"For you are the glory of their strength; by your favor our horn is exalted. For our shield belongs to the Lord, our king, to the Holy One of Israel. Blessed be the Lord forever. Amen and Amen."**

PRAYER: God, you are the glory of our success; by your favor we survive and even thrive. For our protection belongs to the you, our king the Holy One of Israel. We will bless you forever. Amen and Amen.
