

Psalm 102
"The Afflicted Penitent Hopes in the Eternal Lord"
Lenten Midweek 5

March 14, 2018
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
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Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

Here in Psalm 102, the Psalmist acknowledges the vanity of life. For he writes, ***"My days are like an evening shadow; I wither like grass"*** (Psalm 102:11). Throughout this Psalm, the penitent recognizes that one's days are short and full of trouble.

[No Enjoyment]

In Psalm 102, the Psalmist compares life to a puff of smoke, saying ***"For my days pass away like smoke"*** (Psalm 102:3a), or grass that soon withers and fades, saying ***"My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass"*** (Psalm 102:11).

Whether we have a few years to live or decades, it can still seem all too short, and the older we get, the more quickly the time seems to pass. While in elementary school, days move slow, but when high school comes it begins to fly by and this continues throughout our life.

As we grow older, physical afflictions bring great agony along the way. Pain and anxiety rob us of even the simple pleasures of life such as eating, drinking and sleeping.

Even the Psalmist has lost his appetite, so that his food tastes like ash, and he weeps in his cup while he drinks. He writes, ***"I eat ashes like bread and mingle tears with my drink"*** (Psalm 102:9).

As a penitent, the Psalmist finds no enjoyment. In his grief and pain, he feels all alone. He is as lonely as a desert bird, an owl, or a lone bird on a rooftop.

Now, enemies or people who follow the world can cause the penitent even further grief. The Psalmist complains, ***“All the day my enemies taunt me; those who deride me use my name as a curse”*** (Psalm 102:8).

Now, we don’t know exactly how the Psalmist may have been ridiculed, but facing taunts from the world is what is expected of the penitent.

Today, Christians are being ridiculed for simply being a Christian, such as praying to the Triune God when a disaster or conflict arises. The worldly culture says that prayers to God will not change anything.

Also, Christians are ridiculed for following historic Christian doctrine and morality. The world says that these Christians are not with the times and are stuck in the past, and even use words such as “bigots”, “homophobes”, and “sexists” to silence these Penitent Christians. Jesus never said that following Him would be an easy life, for He said, ***“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you”*** (John 15:18-19).

As Penitent Christians, we know a little about being ridiculed by people of the world and this appears to be increasing. As we struggle with the temptations of the world, our flesh, and Satan, we may become further frustrated when we see worldly people seemingly prosper when we face hardships.

The Psalmist cries out to God in his affliction, believing it is a result of God’s ***“indignation and anger”*** (Psalm 102:10).

In all afflictions, the penitent recognizes that troubles in the world are a consequence of God’s anger over sin against Him. The penitent may even feel that the troubles are a result of God’s wrath over personal sin. Like the Psalmist, the penitent may even feel that God is seeking to shorten his days.

Yet, the penitent is crying out to God, trusting that he is eternally faithful, merciful and gracious.

Martin Luther has this to say: “For this psalm —like the other Penitential Psalms — first describes the inner suffering which the saints bear because of their sins in a penitent spirit, then also the persecution by others on account of this same crucified life” (AE 14:179).

[God's Eternal Faithfulness]

Now, the shortness of the Psalmist's life contrasts sharply with the endlessness of God's reign. He cries out: ***"But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever"*** (Psalm 102:12a).

This is a cry of trust in God's eternal faithfulness. It is a turning point from distress to triumph.

You see, the Lord's eternal attributes are the solution to the Psalmist's distress. The penitent finds hope and comfort only in God's eternal faithfulness. The penitent trusts God will hear and deliver in mercy and not deal with him in wrath and judgment.

The Psalmist knew God would deliver Zion. It appears that this psalm may have been written at a time when Jerusalem was in danger. Here, the Psalmist's prayer is not only for himself, but also for the city and its people. He is confident that God will preserve His people so that they can continue to worship Him. The Psalmist is confident that God will always be there for His children.

[Promise of a Savior]

Yet, this Psalm is not just about deliverance for the city, it is the promise of a coming Savior. This promise would lead to the Gentiles praising God, as well as the praise of God for generations to come. The Psalmist writes: ***"Nations will fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth will fear your glory. For the Lord builds up Zion; He appears in His glory; He regards the prayer of the destitute and does not despise their prayer. Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord"*** (Psalm 102:15-18).

This promise also included setting free the captives and prisoners of sin (Psalm 102:20).

As Luke's gospel records, Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath day and stood up to read and unrolled the scroll of Isaiah that was given to Him. Jesus read, "***The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.***" After reading this, all eyes were on Jesus. Then Jesus said, "***Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing***" (Luke 4:16-21).

You see, Jesus the Christ has brought the promised eternal deliverance of God. Jesus is the Word made flesh, God of God, Light of Light.

In penitence, the Psalmist prayed and God heard his prayer and lengthened his days. But, it was not so for the Son of God.

During this penitential season of Lent, we remember that Jesus' days were shortened. For, His days were filled with trouble and sorrow for us. He bore our sin and God's full anger over our sin as He went to the cross of Calvary.

Then, when Jesus said in his dying words, "***It is finished,***" God's wrath over sin was appeased. Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead and later ascended on high, where He now lives and reigns with the Father and Holy Spirit to all eternity.

Because of the one true God's eternal faithfulness, the penitent psalmist concludes his prayer in confident faith. We, too, pray to the one true God in confident faith knowing what He has already done for us in His love – and for what He continues to do for His children. For we know that God will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

So, despite torments, suffering and pain, the Triune God is there to offer you hope and comfort. As the world is spinning out of control as it says "wrong is right" and "right is wrong", God is always calm and strengthens His people through hearing His Word proclaimed in truth and purity. God calms and strengthens His people through His promises and God calms and strengthens His people through His Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

So, through Jesus Christ, we know that we will face suffering and sorrow here in this world, but at the same time we are the heirs of His Heavenly Kingdom, which has no end. Therefore, the afflicted penitent hopes in the eternal Lord! Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen!