

*Psalm 143*  
*"The Penitent Thirsts for the Lord"*  
*Maundy Thursday*

*March 29, 2018*  
*First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.*  
*Pastor Peter Adelsen*

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]*

It is likely that most Americans do not know what it's like to live in a thoroughly parched land – a land so devoid of sustenance, so hot and waterless, that it drains the life out of you within a matter of hours.

The Midwest is especially blessed with rich soil, rivers and lakes, regular rain, and moderate temperatures.

Even when it is hot, temperatures that climb above 100 degrees are rare. And there's enough humidity so that your perspiration lets you know that you're hot. Apart from the American Southwest, there are few areas in our country that could be truly classified as desert.

As Americans, we are very fortunate to live in a part of the world that is bountiful.

Some other parts of the world are not so. For our military who have served in the Middle Eastern countries of Kuwait and Iraq, during the summer months, they know what it's like to live in a thoroughly parched land.

During the month of August in Kuwait, temperatures can climb to more than 130 degrees between the hours of 10 a.m. and 5 p.m.

And, there is no relief from clouds or rain. Even the wind brings no relief, but only serves as a source of pain, as hot sand is blown against any exposed skin.

To be outside during this time of day in this part of the world is so incredibly draining and sapping of all energy that it's hard to understand unless you've been there yourself.

At first, you don't even recognize it, because perspiration evaporates so quickly that you don't realize you're sweating profusely.

Walking even a mile in the heat of the day is like running several miles elsewhere.

Over the course of an hour in such heat, you really begin to feel it. Your body is being drained of vital nutrition, especially fluids. Unless you receive sustenance, you will perish.

You see, the truly penitent child of God recognizes that life in this fallen, sinful world is like that – all the time – no matter where you are. Thus, the penitent thirsts for the Lord.

### *[Oppression from Enemies]*

Here in today's Psalm King David cries out: ***“Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my pleas for mercy! In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness! Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you...I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land”*** (Psalm 143:1-2,6).

Here, David does not base his prayer on his own worthiness before God. He bases his appeal on the Lord's faithfulness to His promises of deliverance through the coming Christ. David asks to be judged, not on the basis of his record, but on the basis of God's mercy. Since David is a child of God through faith, he can call upon the Lord for help.

You see, we do not need to be pursued by an enemy into a desert wilderness to call out to God in desperation. The fallen-ness of our sinful condition confronts us day in and day out. No one is righteous before God. We all stand under God's judgment. We are born sinful and we sin daily in thought, word and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

Our souls are spiritually parched. Our souls are dried up.

You see, without God and the sustenance He alone provides, we are dead in our trespasses and sins.

King David felt great oppression from his enemies. In fact, David felt like one who is buried alive forever. He wrote, ***“For the enemy has pursued my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead”*** (Psalm 143:3).

Like David, we too, have an enemy pursuing us. We are reminded by the Apostle Peter to ***“be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour”*** (1 Peter 5:8).

You see, Satan stalks chiefly those who have been claimed by God as His dear children – God’s children who have been adopted by the Triune God in Holy Baptism.

Satan and his legion seek to attack the faithful with despair, doubt and eventual unbelief. Furthermore, those of the world despise us because we are not of the world. This is especially true in issues of morality – knowing right from wrong and good from evil.

Martin Luther notes: “Here one should keep in mind that this psalm has been and is spoken in the name of the whole people of Christ and of each person individually. The daily enemies of this people are the worldly-wise and the self-righteous, who do not know and refuse to know anything about the grace of God” (AE 14:196).

You see, Satan and the world crush us, seeking to make us feel like we are abandoned by God, trapped in a casket and buried alive.

### ***[We Acknowledge our Weakness]***

Furthermore, David – who killed a giant when he was but a youth – acknowledges his own weakness: ***“Therefore my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled”*** (Psalm 143:4).

Our spirit, too, becomes faint and fails. The old Adam arises each day within us. We are weak and incapable of helping ourselves. We do not know where to go. We don’t know the best choices to make. We are like lost lambs in need of a Good Shepherd.

And so, as we face our own sin and its consequences, we also face the enemies that assail us – Satan, the world and our flesh. We feel smothered and faint.

Like the Penitent Psalmist David, we cry out for mercy – for the forgiveness of our sins. Like David, we “*stretch out our hands to the Lord,*” for our souls thirst for God like a parched land.

And so, we cry out to God for sustenance, for God’s steadfast love, for refuge and deliverance from the enemy, for guidance and teaching.

***[Penitents Need the Lord’s Sustenance]***

As we read through Psalm 143, we see that David is not simply crying out to the Lord because God can rescue him from his enemies. Rather, David thirsts for an ongoing relationship with God that will guide his whole life. That is the way it is with the true penitent.

You see, we need to keep from thinking of God as a fire extinguisher that we turn to only in an emergency and then put back into storage until the next crisis arises. Our need for the Lord and His sustenance is not only in times of crisis, but it is also constant. As penitents, we realize that because of our sin, Satan and the world, we continually need the Lord’s sustenance, and so we continually thirst for the Lord.

***[Jesus Fulfilled all Righteousness for Us]***

David’s weakness is overcome by looking back on the Lord’s great redemptive works. All that God has done in the past, in the “*days of old*” (Psalm 143:5a), together with His unfailing love, gives David confidence for the future.

David calls out to God, trusting that God will deliver him by providing sustenance for his troubled soul. In the Psalm, David asks the Lord to answer his prayer and his plea according to God’s faithfulness and righteousness.

And so, God gives us His righteousness in Jesus the Christ as He brings us to faith in Christ as our Savior. That was a promise David hoped for. For us, this is a promise that is now fulfilled.

You see, the only-begotten Son of God fulfilled all righteousness for us. For we were all lost, because of our sinful condition. But, Jesus, as true God and true Man, made all believers in Him righteous through His perfect life, and as he took upon Himself our sinful flesh as he died upon the cross, and rose again to life three days later.

Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. For everyone who believes and trusts in Him, He alone has taken away your sin! This is all yours and mine by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

*[God Saves Us]*

Now, it's likely we've all seen cartoons of some poor, lost soul crawling through a desert with vultures soaring overhead. He longs for a pool of water from which to quench his thirst lest he die. He may even see what looks like water in the distance, shimmering over the sand. But, as he crawls closer, he realizes it's only another mirage.

So it is with our thirst for God. We can't come to Him. We can't crawl to Him. We can do nothing to quench our own thirst. But, God comes to us with living water, our Savior Jesus Christ.

The Triune God continues to nourish us with His Word and Promises. At the Lord's Supper, our Lord will feed us again with His very body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins and to strengthen our weak faith.

David wraps up Psalm 143 with a plea for life and rescue from enemies: ***“For your name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life! In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble! And in your steadfast love you will cut off my enemies, and you will destroy all the adversaries of my soul, for I am your servant”*** (Psalm 143:11-12).

Thanks be to God alone, we are given life. You see, all that we have is purely by God's grace and for His glory. So regardless of what happens in our lives, we are His, and He will be glorified through us. So, during good times and bad, we have life in Christ. We are children of God and heirs of His kingdom. Amen.

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