

Third Sunday of Advent  
Sermon text: Psalm 146  
Related text: James 5:7-11  
Date preached: December 15, 2013

The Psalms beautifully express the human feelings we have in the midst of all the varied life situations we face. Psalms help us give praise to God. The Psalms comfort us in our sorrow. The Psalms encourage us in our helplessness to trust in God.

The 150 Psalms in Scripture relate our deepest feelings in our relationship with God. For those who are learning how to pray, it is a good place to start by praying through a Psalm each day. Some Psalms being a bit longer (such as Psalm 119, the largest chapter in the Bible) you may want to take in smaller segments.

Psalm 146 is a psalm of praise. The praise we offer is tied to the hope that we have before us today. Yet within our world, it is difficult at times to praise. A half-hour newscast can leave us feeling a lot less hopeful about the world in which we live.

Newscasts aside, the events we face in our own lives can at times leave us feeling disconnected, discouraged, disappointed, depressed, and dying. These “d” words come in many and varied ways.

Take away a smart-phone or computer tablet from a younger generation and you'll find people who feel disconnected rather quickly. We grow to depend upon technology for even the most basic of communication skills.

Of course there are things that we deal with that are much more difficult. Many individuals find it discouraging or disappointing when other people make choices we don't with which we don't agree. As an example, I find it disappointing when realizing that there are at least three hundred people who consider themselves members of St. Paul, but are not here on Sunday mornings. The danger of such a lament is that it gets in my way of appreciating that each of you are here now.

One of the areas where disappointment is pronounced is among leadership, particularly in government. More than simple disagreements on policies, we are quick to point an accusatory finger. Psalm 72:2 may echo in our minds, "Put not your trust in rulers, nor in any child of earth, for there is no help in them. When they breathe their last, they return to earth, and in that day their thoughts perish."

That brings us to another reality. Death. It is an enemy that is always lurking. The eighty year old

thinks he or she should still be able to do what they could when they were 40. Disease impacts our physical and mental abilities and at times we don't even realize that is happening to us, such as the case with those suffering from dementia. Children and adults of every age are not immune to the encroachment of death for it may come at any time as a result of illness or at the hands of another.

There is a lot of things we turn to in order that our lives may be easier, to shake us from depression or to keep death at a distance. A fast paced schedule can serve to keep the focus on ourselves and what I need to do next.

Our sin is when we look to ourselves for hope. When we've convinced ourselves that we can handle things on our own, we've bought into a lie that leads us to glitter and no substance.

Our hope lies not in the things of this world. Our hope lies in God, who has blessed us in amazing and abundant ways. "Blessed are they who have the God of Jacob, for their help! Whose hope is in the Lord their God."

Our hope is in God because we have seen what God has done already. Look at the second half of Psalm 146, from verses 5 and onward.

God made the world in which we live. God has kept every promise made. He kept his promise to Abraham and Sarah when they longed for a child. He kept his promise to David that his lineage would continue. It has through the greatest offspring of that ancestry, Jesus of Nazareth.

In Christ, we have hope even in the midst of our sufferings. We are not abandoned in those seasons of despair, depression, disconnection, discouragement and death. For even in these seasons, God's grace sustains us.

The Apostle Paul speaks of this clearly in the 5 chapter of Romans verses 2-5.

“Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has

been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

Hope does not disappoint us. Our hope is through the Holy Spirit, that reminds us daily that we are bound to the death and resurrection of Christ. The same Lord Jesus, who does set prisoners free, is the same Jesus who sets us free from sin declaring us forgiven.

The eyes of the blind have been opened. People have had their sight restored by Jesus. Eyes filled with darkness are illumined by the light of Christ in that we see our neighbors through his lens of love. It is this same lens by which Jesus has looked upon us. It is the eyes of God’s grace that we may follow him in joy and faithful living. AMEN.