

Lenten Devotional March 7, 2023

Scripture

Psalm 34

*1 I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
2 My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad.
3 O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together.
4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.
5 Look to him, and be radiant;
so your faces shall never be ashamed.
6 This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,
and was saved from every trouble.
7 The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.
8 O taste and see that the LORD is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.
9 O fear the LORD, you his holy ones,
for those who fear him have no want.
10 The young lions suffer want and hunger,
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.*

*11 Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
12 Which of you desires life,
and covets many days to enjoy good?
13 Keep your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking deceit.
14 Depart from evil, and do good;
seek peace, and pursue it.*

*15 The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their cry.
16 The face of the LORD is against evildoers,
to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.
17 When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears,
and rescues them from all their troubles.
18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted,
and saves the crushed in spirit.*

*19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the LORD rescues them from them all.
20 He keeps all their bones;*

*not one of them will be broken.
21 Evil brings death to the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
22 The LORD redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.*

Devotional

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Psalm 34 is a promise of rescue from trouble and respite from broken heartedness for those who put their trust in God.

In a devotional of her own, author and pastor Rachel Hackenberg once contrasted the psalmist's encouragement to pursue peace (v 14) with Pennsylvania's invitation to travelers to pursue happiness. About six years ago, the Commonwealth created new highway welcome signs. Their slogan riffs on a historic Pennsylvania-signed document, saying "pursue your happiness." With its flourished font and lower case letters, it invites visitors to seek trouble-free indulgence here.

The psalmist, on the other hand, asks us to do the harder thing: pursue peace. This is neither comfortable nor easy. The psalm is replete with references to evils and spirit-crushing troubles. We know what that is like. We are living through a time when it seems very hard to embrace promises of good because every day reminds us of nearby perils, from violence to climate change to pandemics to threats upon our liberties and our democracy. Some days it could be hard to raise a hand to the psalmist's question in verse 12, "Which of you desires life and covets many days to enjoy good?"

We know that Pennsylvania is a good place to find happiness. But faithful pursuit—of either peace or happiness—is hard work that demands our resilience and steadfastness. It's nothing like tourism. Thankfully, we are not alone on the journey, and ultimately God will keep us unbroken.

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, hear this poor soul crying out to you for deliverance. I know you will answer, for your goodness is great. Amen.