

Lent Devotional April 4, 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

The Rev. Dr. Jonathan D. Lawrence '97

A few years ago, I heard a Jewish colleague say that of all the Torah's commandments, peace and justice are the only two things that are to be "pursued" because they are the hardest to achieve.

"Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace and pursue it" (v 14) appears in the midst of a litany of promises of care and protection for God's people. At first glance some of these promises might suggest that those who follow God will never suffer, but if that were the case, why would the psalmist need to say in verse 18, "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit"? Many people have held onto their faith despite their suffering, remembering the promise of verse 15: "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry."

What might it look like for God's people to seek peace and pursue it in the face of suffering? This last year my neighbors in Buffalo have dealt with a racially-motivated massacre, and a year-end blizzard in which many people lost their lives and many others were left shivering in homes without heat or power. Our religious leaders of many faiths struggled to meet people's basic needs and educate people about the injustices underlying the crises facing the community, even while nursing their own and others' broken hearts. It is indeed hard to achieve, but pursuing peace can transform the world.

Prayer

This Lenten season, may we take refuge in God, listen to others' cries for help, comfort the brokenhearted, depart from evil, seek peace, and pursue it. Amen.