

Lenten Devotional February 28, 2024

Scriptures

Psalm 5

- 1 *Give ear to my words, O LORD;
give heed to my sighing.*
- 2 *Listen to the sound of my cry,
my King and my God,
for to you I pray.*
- 3 *O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice;
in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch.*

- 4 *For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;
evil will not sojourn with you.*
- 5 *The boastful will not stand before your eyes;
you hate all evildoers.*
- 6 *You destroy those who speak lies;
the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful.*

- 7 *But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love,
will enter your house,
I will bow down toward your holy temple
in awe of you.*
- 8 *Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness
because of my enemies;
make your way straight before me.*

- 9 *For there is no truth in their mouths;
their hearts are destruction;
their throats are open graves;
they flatter with their tongues.*
- 10 *Make them bear their guilt, O God;
let them fall by their own counsels;
because of their many transgressions cast them out,
for they have rebelled against you.*

- 11 *But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;
let them ever sing for joy.
Spread your protection over them,
so that those who love your name may exult in you.*
- 12 *For you bless the righteous, O LORD;
you cover them with favor as with a shield.*

Matthew 4:1-20

1 Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. 2 He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 3 "Listen! A sower went out to

sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold." 9 And he said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

10 When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. 11 And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; 12 in order that 'they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.'"

13 And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? 14 The sower sows the word. 15 These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. 16 And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. 17 But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. 18 And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. 20 And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold."

Devotion

The Rev. Dr. Jonathan D. Lawrence '97

The last few years have been challenging between COVID-19, economic and political challenges, severe weather, and violence nearby and far away. Each day as the news brings new concerns, many of us may feel like the psalmist: "[G]ive heed to my sighing. Listen to the sound of my cry," (Ps 5:1-2). These years have been particularly difficult for clergy and congregational leaders and many have even decided to leave the ministry in this time of uncertainty. What should we do?

I serve both as a pastor and a religion professor and in both roles I often find myself caught between people saying "We just want to go back to what it was like before the pandemic" and others saying "That world doesn't exist anymore and we can't go back and we won't go back!" The pandemic brought loss and change but in the midst of that loss people found new ways to interact, even through the dreaded Zoom screen. Those streaming worship services were less than perfect but they allowed shut-ins and faraway family members to join in worship. We found new ways to organize and support our communities through porch drop-offs of food for the hungry. When my congregation could finally meet in person again, it was still painful for some of our members because it just didn't feel the same. What should we do?

Some days I feel as clueless as the disciples who heard Jesus' words but didn't understand him. But today's parable gives me some reassurance. The sower spreads the seed without knowing how it will grow—and without responsibility for making it grow. I don't have any big answers, but in the meantime I can keep teaching and caring for the people around me and let God do the rest. And like the psalmist I can start to say "But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy," (Ps 5:11). It's not the answer I was looking for, but many days it is enough.

Prayer

Lord, we turn to you for direction in a troubled and confusing world. We want answers but we know that sometimes there aren't answers. We take refuge in you and ask you to help the seeds that we have planted grow and bear fruit in service of your people. Amen.