

Advent Devotional December 20, 2019

Scripture

Psalm 102

*1 Hear my prayer, O LORD;
let my cry come to you.*

*2 Do not hide your face from me
in the day of my distress.
Incline your ear to me;
answer me speedily in the day when I call.*

*3 For my days pass away like smoke,
and my bones burn like a furnace.*

*4 My heart is stricken and withered like grass;
I am too wasted to eat my bread.*

*5 Because of my loud groaning
my bones cling to my skin.*

*6 I am like an owl of the wilderness,
like a little owl of the waste places.*

*7 I lie awake;
I am like a lonely bird on the housetop.*

*8 All day long my enemies taunt me;
those who deride me use my name for a curse.*

*9 For I eat ashes like bread,
and mingle tears with my drink,*

*10 because of your indignation and anger;
for you have lifted me up and thrown me aside.*

*11 My days are like an evening shadow;
I wither away like grass.*

*12 But you, O LORD, are enthroned forever;
your name endures to all generations.*

*13 You will rise up and have compassion on Zion,
for it is time to favor it;
the appointed time has come.*

*14 For your servants hold its stones dear,
and have pity on its dust.*

*15 The nations will fear the name of the LORD,
and all the kings of the earth your glory.*

*16 For the LORD will build up Zion;
he will appear in his glory.*

*17 He will regard the prayer of the destitute,
and will not despise their prayer.*

*18 Let this be recorded for a generation to come,
so that a people yet unborn may praise the LORD:*

*19 that he looked down from his holy height,
from heaven the LORD looked at the earth,*

*20 to hear the groans of the prisoners,
to set free those who were doomed to die;*

*21 so that the name of the LORD may be declared in Zion,
and his praise in Jerusalem,*

22 when peoples gather together,
and kingdoms, to worship the LORD.
23 He has broken my strength in midcourse;
he has shortened my days.
24 "O my God," I say, "do not take me away
at the mid-point of my life,
you whose years endure
throughout all generations."
25 Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
26 They will perish, but you endure;
they will all wear out like a garment.
You change them like clothing, and they pass away;
27 but you are the same, and your years have no end.
28 The children of your servants shall live secure;
their offspring shall be established in your presence.

Devotional

The Rev. Dr. J. Gregory Clark '71/'75

Our firstborn emerged from the womb on Epiphany, five weeks earlier than the gestation calendar predicted. As she grew out of her crib and toddled around the manse, she demonstrated a growing curiosity portraying a contagious, inquisitive mind, seeking to understand this world into which she was born and the Creator who gave her the gift of life.

Now, nearly a half century later, she continues to ask me, "Why, Daddy?" Of course, she no longer crawls up on my lap and looks me straight in the eye as a little child, but the longing to grasp the mysteries of God's provision has not abated. This past Mother's Day, she posted on Facebook a message that gripped my heart. She wrote, "Thank you Lance and my 3 sweet little angels in heaven for providing me the opportunity to be a mom." Our daughter, who surprised us with her early arrival, delivered a healthy baby boy who is now a teenager, bore two fetal forms that were swept away in miscarriages, and carried a still-born baby who could not survive long enough to take even a first breath.

The prayer of the Psalmist cries out, "My heart is stricken and withered like grass." Three times our hearts ached and broke along with the heart of our daughter as fleeting moments of joy almost erupted, but then suddenly vaporized as the dreams vanished from view. We rejoice with our daughter in the life of her son, who continues to bring great joy to his parents and grandparents and to extended family. Like our inquisitive daughter, we also ask our heavenly Father, "Why, Daddy?"

Advent, a season of expectation filled with hopeful signs and joy-filled anticipation, is at the same time a season of Divine Revelation. God, to whom the Psalmist prays most fervently, emerges in the most unexpected way as a baby, born to a virgin by the miracle of the Nativity. God's promise is fulfilled in ways that far surpass our wildest imaginations. Emmanuel, "God with Us!"

God has never forsaken us. God accompanies us through all our darkest nights. God promises eternal blessings, in our generation and for all our offspring—those whom we know and love, and those whom we have yet to meet.

Prayer

Abba, Father, thank you for granting me unlimited opportunities to present my needs to You. Help me to be content in receiving whatever paths and provisions You offer. May my frail and feeble faith keep me open to trust that You know the way I must go and be all-sufficient as I continue my journey through life. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.