

Advent Devotional December 5, 2020

Scripture

Psalm 90

1 Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. 2 Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. 3 You turn us back to dust, and say, "Turn back, you mortals." 4 For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night. 5 You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; 6 in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers. 7 For we are consumed by your anger; by your wrath we are overwhelmed. 8 You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance. 9 For all our days pass away under your wrath; our years come to an end like a sigh. 10 The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. 11 Who considers the power of your anger? Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you. 12 So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart. 13 Turn, O LORD! How long? Have compassion on your servants! 14 Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. 15 Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us, and as many years as we have seen evil. 16 Let your work be manifest to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. 17 Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands—O prosper the work of our hands!

Devotional

The Rev. Christopher Brown '08

"Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands—O prosper the work of our hands!" (v. 17). I remember sitting in the reference room of the Barbour Library at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and praying this psalm as I began work on the last of my ordination exams. Psalm 90 happened to be the psalm for that morning in the Daily Lectionary, and it felt like a providentially timed word from God. "Yes Lord, please prosper the work of my hands," I thought, as I began to parse and translate the Greek passage assigned for the exegesis exam. But there's a deeper longing behind this Psalm than the simple desire to pass a test.

The psalmist's plea for success arises after a meditation on the relatively brief and inconsequential lives we live. We last only a moment before God turns us back to dust (vv. 3-4). Wisdom, it seems, consists in recognizing that our days are few (v. 12). So the psalmist pleads for the Lord to show compassion by confirming, establishing, and prospering the work we do during these short lives. One could paraphrase this plea by saying, "Lord, I know I won't last forever, so please let something I've done outlive me."

The good news is that in Jesus Christ, whose advent we both remember and await in this season, God has answered the psalmist's plea for our lives to be more than grass that fades and withers (v. 6). The Son of God came so we might receive the life that is "from everlasting to everlasting" (v. 2). This is why, after meditating on the mysteries of the resurrection, the Apostle Paul could instruct the Corinthian Christians to "Be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58). In that hope, may we direct all our longing for meaning and success to the One who satisfies us with his steadfast love: Jesus.

Prayer (from Psalm 90:14-17)

O Lord, "satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. . . . Let your work be manifest to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. Let the

favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands—O prosper the work of our hands!”