

Lenten Devotional February 18, 2018

Scripture

Daniel 9:3-10

³Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. ⁴I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, “Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, ⁵we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. ⁶We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land. ⁷“Righteousness is on your side, O Lord, but open shame, as at this day, falls on us, the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. ⁸Open shame, O LORD, falls on us, our kings, our officials, and our ancestors, because we have sinned against you. ⁹To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him, ¹⁰and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God by following his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

Devotional

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The annual journey through Lent draws us into a time of contemplation. We are invited to think deeply about God, ourselves, and our communities. Such reflections will likely surface reasons for despair and reasons for hope. In these verses from the prophet Daniel, we find honesty about individual and collective wrongdoing (“we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances”) and the shame that followed. Daniel’s confession, however, is preceded and followed by affirmation of God’s steadfast love, love that is not deterred or diminished by human action. Shame does not drive the prophet away from God; rather, it prompts his plea for the mercy and forgiveness that belong to God. The prophet trusts that God is a God of mercy and forgiveness, despite human rebellion.

Lent provides time for contemplation, time for “fasting, sackcloth, ashes”—or whatever our modern equivalent of those disciplines might be. As we mourn our individual and collective disobedience and seek to live more fully and faithfully into God’s covenant, we do so knowing that we are bound to a community of believers who profess the realities of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. This community of believers—past and present—helps us offer honest confessions of wrongdoing. It also helps us name the never-ending hope grounded in God’s steadfast love, mercy, and forgiveness.

Prayer

Gracious and steadfast God, in this season of contemplation and reflection, we offer thanks for your unrelenting presence with us. Surround us with the gift of an honest community with whom we can confess our turning away and alongside whom we can continually recommit to embracing your love. Amen.