

Lent Devotional April 2, 2020

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. John E. White '82/'09, Specialized Ministry (2019)

“. . . to set free those who were doomed to die . . .” (v. 20b). If one were ever in search of a vision of abandonment and total desolation, there is no need to look beyond the wisdom of Psalm 102. Just a little imagination can bridge the connection between its words and many contemporary situations of pain and struggle.

Recently, a friend shared with me, her family and friends, and all her co-workers that she had been diagnosed with ALS. Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (more commonly known as Lou Gehrig’s Disease) is a progressive neurodegenerative condition that affects nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord. There is no known cure, and its impact is brutal on the individuals afflicted with it and on the people who love them.

Those of us who heard this news from my friend were devastated; many were moved to tears. It would have been more than understandable if this person adopted the existential stance depicted in verse 11 of Psalm 102: “My days are like an evening shadow, I wither away like grass.”

The surprising part of this scenario is that the person who was living this story had an amazing sense of calm surrounding her. Through her speech, which was becoming increasingly slurred, she had taken on the role of ministering to us, even passing out cookies as we gathered around the table. This person, who was neither seminary-trained nor a leader in her church, provided a level of pastoral care for us that I had never seen before. She was able to embody the sentiment of the psalmist that God is indeed in charge of all that we can see, and beyond: “Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you endure” (vv. 25-26a).

My friend’s faith had given her freedom—a gift she shared with us.

Prayer

O God of heaven and earth, I pause to give thanks to you for the gift of life and the promise of life everlasting. Amid the challenges of this world, help me to see the precious moments of your grace.

Constantly renew my faith as I live in the power of the resurrection. These things I pray in the glorious name of Jesus, our Blessed Savior. Amen.