

Joshua 8:30-35

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[0 : 00] Again, the scripture reading is Psalm 134 on page 519 in the Blue Bibles.

Please stand for the reading of God's word. Psalm 134, a song of ascents. Come bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord, lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord.

May the Lord bless you from Zion, he who made heaven and earth. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. There comes a moment on any journey when your mind naturally begins to turn toward home.

It's the anticipation that was naturally building long before you left is worn off. All the planning, all the packing for the trip is a distant memory.

And even the travel to get where you were going is beyond anything you can recall. Your mind turns toward home. Even the reason for setting out in the first place is nearly accomplished.

[1 : 29] I don't know about you, but if your trip involves a reunion, a family gathering of some sort, while relationships may have been renewed, separate lives must be returned to.

Usually with events like this, one final large group gathering can't be resisted.

But from there, everyone scatters like the wind. Cars to pack, planes to catch, work awaits on the other end. So it is for us today.

On two fronts. Our summer journey through the song of ascents concludes. And it's only right since this last week we saw the first official day of fall roll in.

We gather today then around one final poem. Psalm 134. We've been here 15 weeks through these psalms.

[2 : 31] But from here, we will scatter like the wind. In addition, our time at KAM finishes today. For six and a half years, this has been our rain shelter, our tent, our hiding place, and I've thoroughly enjoyed it.

I don't know if I'll ever preach again with the Korah up behind me. Or the eternal light guarding the way.

I've appreciated the classic Chicago brick that has adorned the backdrop and assisted our singing.

And if you're not familiar with Chicago brick, the dark ones along the way are the clunkers.

They're in nearly every Chicago building from a long way back. This brick is home. I will love remembrances of the dome-shaped ceiling with its star-like lighted canopy, pinholes in a sheet separating earth from heaven.

All the stimulation for our imagination over six Christmas seasons. It's never been hard for me to imagine the angels descending come Christmas time in here.

[3 : 59] But today, within 40 minutes, less probably, only three verses in the text, it'll all be a memory.

The four corners of the world await us. The parking lot on Sundays will be exchanged for metered spots on 53rd and Blackstone. Secret service checkpoints in hopes that your name is actually on that you might get in.

We'll be traded for Hyde Park's business district and free floating foot traffic. We gather one more time. We've done this.

This is our third time. We were two years old. We left our first place. And on that day, and I don't know what it was, 2,000 or so, I gathered all the people in the midst of the sermon and took a photo from here so I would remember it.

A couple years later, when we left the Lutheran School of Theology, we did the same. And today, I've brought my camera. I don't know how often you've been to churches where the preaching was attended with pictures.

[5 : 10] I don't do it very often. You know my feelings on the Word of God expounded, but I will do it today. So if you don't want to be seen, stick to the back.

But what I would like you to do is to stand, everyone move in, put your arms around each other, introduce yourself, because I'm taking your picture.

I'm not getting everybody.

I can't go much farther back now. This back corner would do well over on this back corner. All right? We're not going to get everyone, but we'll try. Everyone, we'll give them five seconds. Five, four, three, two, one.

[6 : 21] Oh, you look wonderful. I feel especially bad for those of you who are visiting.

I hope that you might return anyway. But today, you've walked in on something. Two journeys have come to an end.

The summer series and the songs of ascents and our time here. You know, we're not the only ones to experience such days. In ancient Israel, pilgrims attending one of the three great annual feasts also would have that moment within the celebration week when their mind would naturally turn toward home.

the celebration nearly over. The reason for gathering almost concluded. Just one more get together. One more song.

And then, like us, they would scatter to the winds. And they would do this three times a year. And this collection of songs that we've been in for 15 weeks is a collection that was wedded to the history of their pilgrimage.

[7 : 46] And indeed, there was a need for a final song. Psalm 134 is placed in the final position for a reason.

It is a song to be sung when departing, when setting out. not setting out in a sense having everything yet in front of you, but setting out when all the reason for coming has been laid to rest. In fact, while we normally think of all 15 in this traveling song book to be sung on their way up the ascents of Jerusalem and to the city, I wonder if this final one would have been sung at the conclusion of the week or even as the pilgrims set out for home.

This great throng of gathered families preparing to disperse with one final hymn to sing. After all, the lyrics of Psalm 134 indicate that the people are the ones singing in verses 1 and 2.

And they're singing to the servants who will remain in the city and in particular in the temple. While verse 3 finds what would have been the Levitic priesthood returning the call that had been given and begun by the congregation.

[9 : 22] Verse 3, almost what I would term an even song of their own. a benediction back upon the people. So when you think of it, you have the gathered assembly, the great celebration complete, the people rising, already dispersing, calling out to those who will stay in the city and take guard over the temple and they call upon them, Come!

Bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord who stand by night in the house of the Lord. May I join them, Lift up your hands to the holy place or in holiness and bless the Lord.

And then, in great antiphonal sense, with quieted tones because the number would be fewer, this return from those who remain, May the Lord bless you.

from Zion, He who made heaven and earth. Quite a beautiful concluding song.

There's a hint, I think, the major hint that this proposed structure that I am laying forth is indeed intended. The hint is, of course, in the biblical context for that word servants.

[10 : 51] verse 1, Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord. Now, the word servant here in the Hebrew, of course, has a multitude of applications from the lowest servant in a house to the servants who have, in a sense, become enslaved via war to the servants of elevated stature to all the subjects of the king to, most prominently in Isaiah, the suffering servant who would display God's grace and victory and wonder.

But when you attach the word servants here with the phrase those who stand by night in the house of the Lord, we think of the servants in the Levitic priesthood.

We think of those who served in the temple who were responsible. Take a look back to Deuteronomy in chapter 10 and verse 8.

I'm slower than you today. Moses, at the time of the second table coming, verse 8, at that time the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord to stand before the Lord, to minister to Him, that is to serve Him, and to bless in His name to this day.

Therefore, Levi has no portion or inheritance with his brothers. The Lord is an inheritance as the Lord your God said to him. The tribe of Levi was commissioned of all the people to stand in the presence of the Lord for the purpose of blessing His name.

[12:43] Indeed, our psalm opens, Come, bless the Lord, all of you servants of the Lord who stand by night in the house of the Lord. One commentator has said, So long as the sanctuary was standing, a portion of the servants of God who ministered in it had to remain up at night to guard it to see that nothing was wanting in the preparations for the early service.

that this ministering watching should be combined with devotional praying is indeed the key to the admonition of verse 2.

So, if this is true, then what you have in verses 1 and 2 are the kinds of prayers offered by the people on behalf of the priesthood who would stand and watch over the temple by night long after they had dispersed from the city to come some months later.

I think of the writer who said concerning this feast, this tabernacle, this temple song, the last cloud of smoke from the evening sacrifice has mixed with the blue sky.

The last note of the evening hymn has died away on the ear. The watch is being set for the night. The 24 Levites, the three priests and the captain of the guard whose duty it was to keep ward from the sunset to sunrise over the hallowed precincts are already at their several posts and the multitude are retiring through the gates.

[14:19] Well, the Targum, which is the Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Scriptures and attending that translation is midrash or interpretive notes that go alongside it.

The Targum explains the first verse of the temple watch. Quote, the custom in the second temple appears to have been this. After midnight, the chief of the doorkeepers took the key of the inner temple and went with some of the priests through a small postern of the fire gate.

In the inner court, this watch divided itself into two companies, each carrying a burning torch. One company turned west, the other east, and so they compassed the court to see whether all were in readiness for the temple service on the following morning.

In the bake house, where the minca, the meat offering of the high priest was baked, they met with the cry, all well. Meanwhile, the rest of the priests arose, bathed themselves, put on their garments, then they went into the stone chamber, one half of which was the hall of the session of the Sanhedrin, and there under the superintendence of the officer who gave the watchword, and one of the Sanhedrin, surrounded by the priests, clad in the robes of office.

Their several duties for the coming day were assigned to each of the priests by lot. So what you have, I've mentioned it to you before when I've been to the Tower of London in that wonderful evening exchange called the changing of the guard, or I can't actually remember the term for it, the ceremony of the keys, where the tower itself is locked at night, and all the beef waters are inside, and they have that march through to make sure that everything's right, ready for the next day.

[16:07] Now imagine God's people having come from one of the great celebrations of the year, having ascended into Jerusalem, having feasted and offered their sacrifices for a week, and now they have turned their minds toward home, dispersed, back to work.

But before doing so, one final family gathering, one final hymn, the people rising and saying to the Levitical priesthood, come, or in the Hebrew, behold, we call you to this.

We call you to what? Bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord who stand by night in the house of the Lord. Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord.

What a moment in Israel's history. What a moment for us to remember. They're returning home, but the priesthood is to remain vigilant, prayerful, and faithful.

134, verse 1, behold, behold, we call upon you, the people of God, calling upon the priesthood to bless the Lord.

[17:35] The word bless, it certainly is the center of gravity within the psalm. It's in every verse. At least once come, bless the Lord. Verse 2, lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord.

Verse 3, the antiphonal response, may the Lord bless you from Zion. My great grandfather was a maker of plaques, initially plaster, and one of them that was a family highlight is simply the word bless.

It is the calling of the Christian. 1 Peter picks up on this very clearly. You were called to be a blessing. Just as God has blessed all the families in the earth through the fulfillment of His promises through Jesus Christ, so too all who are in Him are called to be a blessing to bless.

Blessing is the task of those who oversee God's people. What is it to bless God? It's to proclaim His worth. It's to magnify His name.

It is to speak His name with reverence and awe and fear. It is to lift Him up. Not that God can be made bigger, but to make big of God. To see that He is rightly praised.

[18 : 57] That's the responsibility of the priesthood. No wonder they're to do this, verse 2, with their hands raised. Did you notice that? The hand raised ascribes something to an object.

Let me put it just as pedestrian as I can. When you wave to one another, you're signifying something. You are signifying relationship. A wave, other than if it's a parade where they do this thing, a wave signifies relationship.

A handshake signifies a greeting. hand raised ascribes worth and honor.

Wonder. Even if it's at an athletic event. We are ascribing wonder at what has transpired before us.

A hand raised then in regard to this is something that I want to just spend a minute on in regard to the context of our church. We need to remember that those who would raise their hands in the presence of God in the sanctuary are not necessarily the overly emotional within us, the charismatically inclined who have to only be expressive and no one else is worshipping.

[20 : 31] But at the same time, I just want to say that all of us in regard to our worship service, we need to protect those in our midst. We could use a little hand raising once in a while.

I don't want to mistake temperament with spirituality. Once temperament, I don't know that God saves your temperament. We can debate this later.

But there are those who by nature and by temperament are more reserved, whose hearts are raised and who are worshipping God in spirit and in truth. So we are never to think that those who never raised their hands in the assembly somehow are not authentically worshipping.

But nor should we think that those who raised their hands are somehow less authentic or need different things than we need. I want to be the pastor of a congregation where there is at times, even within the most reserved among us, an ascription to the Lord that says, holy is your name.

Not about me. I wave to my friends on the street, signifying relationship. I greet those with a shake, signifying a welcome.

[21 : 53] I am not afraid to raise my hands into the presence of the one who is the creator of heaven and earth and the savior of my soul to ascribe to him glory and honor, wisdom, power, now and forevermore.

That should be freely done. Indeed, it is enjoined to the priesthood, lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord.

that's a great phrase, to the holy place. Another way to understand it would be in holiness.

Lift up your hands in holiness. You would wash your hands signifying cleanness. And your hands then are a signification of your heart and they are to be done in holiness.

This is a wonderful thing. The people are preaching to the preachers here. They are saying, we have a word for all those who minister in our midst, who are called to it vocationally.

[23 : 03] Behold, you are to make it your vocation to bless the Lord, to lift up your hands, to ascribe him great honor, and you are to do it in holiness.

Enough of those in the ministry who aren't adorning by their lives the graces of the gospel with which they profess week in and week out.

This is, in one sense, the call of the people upon God's priests. I'll come back in a little bit to the end in regard to the signification of the priesthood of all believers.

But I just want to say that this does apply to us at Holy Trinity Church, that when the night settles down upon the church, the people should be making it their call for prayers to be made, prayers for blessing, unhindered ascription to God for His greatness.

And it's to be done in holiness. The priest's benediction, verse 3, is what follows the people's prayer in verses 1 and 2.

[24 : 23] I like to imagine this final benediction of the priesthood raining down from the heights of the temple walls in Jerusalem as the people exit the city and depart home as they do.

I mean, imagine the sound of this lullaby almost. this even song flowing down upon the people. It's a benediction. It's a blessing. May the Lord bless you from Zion, He who made heaven and earth. Imagine, at one moment, the priesthood of Israel is enjoined with holy hands to be raised before God and to be giving themselves to the blessing of His name.

And in that act, simply now they are redirecting their words from God to the people. Now, as I am blessing God, now may God bless you from Zion.

And mysteriously then, the band of the faithful who go back into the countryside find God's grace bending down over the walls and upon them like the sun in the summer and His face shining toward them and His peace resting upon them.

[25 : 50] That's what a benediction is at the end of our service. It's this enactment that is done in faith where there is a blessing.

place to pawn you as you depart. It's not a formality. It's an act of prayerful, hopeful expectation that God's peace would be upon you.

And look at what they say, may the Lord bless you from Zion. I mean, it's almost shorthand, as one writer says, it's shorthand for the Aaronic blessing. Aaron was the high priest and his sons were to carry on the work.

And in Numbers 6, 24, we read, the Lord spoke to Moses saying, speak to Aaron and his sons saying, thus you shall bless the people of Israel. This was their role. You shall say to them, the Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel and I will bless them.

[26 : 57] That's what happens each week at the end of our service. There is a placing of God's name upon you in faith and that God would bless you as you go.

You don't want to hurry out before the benediction. I think of our own family. I don't know if I should share it but I've already begun so there it is.

Ever since our children were little we've sung this ironic blessing after evening prayers. The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine upon you and give you peace. peace. This is in one sense fulfilled this entire psalm in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Imagine as I mentioned earlier Isaiah takes this phrase servant who serves at night in the temple of the Lord and Jesus himself says well I am the temple and I'm in the temple and I administer the temple and it is my body and he is the suffering servant imagine imagine the angelic host upon his incarnation and his life of obedience peering over the canopy of heavens and onto earth calling out to the second person of the Trinity bless the Lord you servant of the Lord you who minister in the house of the Lord bless the Lord and he does it in holiness that is perfect complete pure beautiful strong never wanting no lack he did it he served and in doing so as his own life was lived in blessing of God every day every hour most especially in that crucible of the cross where he was obedient to death that in his name he blesses all the families of the earth he turns to you

[29 : 15] Jesus does and says may the Lord bless you it is finished my my goodness what what that does to one's religion it alters it into relationship that we enter into the temple of the most high the holy of holies kadosh kadosh kadosh in Christ God's faithful servant and therefore the entire structure of the psalm then rests almost as it is with the priesthood of believers and we can genuinely say to one another I call upon you brother sister in Christ with your life this week bless the Lord as you as you minister in his name this week bless the

Lord in the evening hours when everyone has long gone to bed and your soul is restless bless the Lord be vigilant be faithful in holiness we say it to one another and the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ seated at the right hand of the Father pierces through the pinholes of the tapestry of our existence and he pronounces his blessing upon us what a journey what what a way to go out the door for indeed tomorrow's a new day new work to do classes to teach books to read children to raise faithfulness to be done and with it with this word then awake for the breaking light of Christ has shined on you make your life be that which is given over to blessing well journeys come to an end but God's work does not let's pray our heavenly father we ask that in these simple refrains our lives would be forever altered for your glory for our good for the welfare of this city in Christ's name amen let's stand together awake

Jerusalem awake no longer in your sins remain the garment of salvation take awake Jerusalem awake your beauty and your strength will come again Jerusalem Jerusalem lift up your voice and sing Hosanna in the highest Hosanna to the King!

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, lift up your voice and sing.

[34 : 04] Hosanna in the highest, Hosanna to the King.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, lift up your voice and sing.
Hosanna in the highest, Hosanna to the King.
Jerusalem, Jerusalem, lift up your voice and sing.
Hosanna in the highest, Hosanna to the King.

[35 : 08] I receive now the benediction. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen. And you may be seated.
Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.