

Christmas: Week 1

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Preacher: Fr. Caleb Evans

[0:00] The Lord heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Merry Christmas, brothers and sisters. Merry Christmas. Or, as Deacon Mark accidentally said on Christmas Eve, brothers and Christmas, merry sisters.

I'm not going to let you live that down, man. Christmas is still going. The secular culture may have moved on, but we have many more days of feasting and celebrating in front of us.

Isn't that great? I want to focus on a small portion of our psalm for this morning. Verses 2 and 3.

What they mean for us in light of what we celebrate at Christmas, which is the gift of Jesus.

The Word become flesh. First, a little bit about binding up wounds. I had a recent reminder of how valuable binding up wounds can be. A few weeks ago, my dear wife Elaine sliced her thumb open on a piece of a metal lid.

[1:25] Yeah, go ahead and groan. It was awful. We were all horrified and thinking about getting to the emergency room. Then we called up Pat Daig, who graciously came over right away and took care of Elaine's wound.

With Pat's care, Elaine didn't need stitches and didn't get an infection. But as valuable as binding up physical wounds can be, healing the wounds of the soul is even greater.

More on that in a little bit. Let's begin by talking a little bit about the context of Psalm 147. It's likely that the psalm was originally written on the topic of God's people returning from exile in Babylon.

But what is said in these verses that we're going to look at this morning also has much to teach us about an even greater return from exile. The return from sin and death.

The return from the expulsion from the garden and God's fellowship that we who believe have found in Christ. The image of exile and return foreshadows our own rescue from sin and our salvation in Jesus.

[2:42] We find pictures, types of Jesus in the Old Testament in general and certainly in the Psalms. So let's see him together in God's word this morning.

Verses 3 and 4 in our psalm we see three things that the Lord does for his lost and exiled people. That's what I want us to focus on this first Sunday after Christmas.

In verse 3 we read this. The Lord builds up Jerusalem. In the most immediate sense this verse is probably talking about God's faithfulness to Israel and the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the exile.

But really this simple statement applies to so much more than that because God, of course, is still in the business of building up his people. It's hard not to read this and think of what Jesus says in Matthew chapter 16 that he will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. In case we are tempted to doubt God's plan or his ability to build up his people look at the gift of God's only son which we remember this Christmas season. God is all in.

[4:10] So much so that he gave his only son to make it happen. So what we see in the New Testament actually we're looking at this with our New Testament glasses on is not that the Lord building up Jerusalem is no longer the case we actually see an expansion on that.

The Apostle Paul talks in Ephesians chapter 2 he says Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision which is made in the flesh by hands remember that you were at that time separated from Christ alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise having no hope and without God in the world.

Oh my, we've got antiphonal crying going on. Amen. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility. By abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two so make in peace and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross thereby killing the hostility.

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near for through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father.

[5:56] So then you are no longer strangers and aliens but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. or as Paul also says in our reading from Galatians for today in Christ there is no Jew there is no Greek we are all one.

So God isn't just building up Jerusalem now God is building up a household that consists of Jewish believers in Jesus and Gentile believers a household that consists of believers from all over the world from every nation we have all been brought near to God through the blood of Christ and the hostility between us has been broken down so that all who believe are given the right to become children of God and are brought together into one new people in Jesus.

Jesus and of course we are waiting the day when the promise of new Jerusalem comes down when there will be no sorrow pain tears or death ever again and where God's people will see his face and bear his name.

God has been faithful in building up his people again and again. I'm reminded that our dear bishop often says it is the Lord's church and he has promised that he will build it.

Isn't that great? His promise to do so will be completely fulfilled. How do we know?

[7:45] How can that be? Because God gave his only son and is building us into a dwelling place for God by his spirit. How awesome is that?

That household that he's building in that city of course consists of individual people who have been saved by the gift of God's only son.

Which brings us to this morning's second point. He gathers the outcasts of Israel. In the most immediate sense our text is again probably referring to those of Israel who had gone into exile.

God gathered them up those who were lost and brought them home. He has a way of doing that doesn't he? He of course is still gathering the outcasts of Israel but with the coming of Jesus God's gathering of the outcasts has only expanded.

That's a recurring theme this morning. Because now because of Jesus God is gathering the outcasts of every tribe and tongue and nation of the world. This morning's first point looked at the hole that God is building up.

[9:00] His household with members from all over the world. But now we're looking at the particulars and what it means for us as individuals. And really what it means is this. no matter who you are, no matter where you're from, no matter what your background is, no matter how badly you've sinned and messed up, if you will call on the name of Jesus, God will forgive your sins and make you his beloved son or daughter.

And even if we're outcasts and misfits, that does not change a thing. As a bit of an odd ball myself, I find that more than a little comforting. God has a particular love for outcasts, actually, for broken or hurting or sinful people that the world might tend to overlook or reject.

I'm reminded of what the Apostle Paul said to the church at Corinth. Consider your calling, brothers, not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth, but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Even if we are outcasts, or perhaps we can say especially if we are outcasts, there is a place for us at the foot of the cross. We must not let shame or fear of rejection keep us from coming to Jesus.

[10:45] He does not turn away anyone who comes to him in repentance and faith. And no matter how lost we might be, we are never too lost for Jesus to find us and to bring us home.

not only that, we are never too wounded for Jesus to heal us. Which brings me to this morning's final point.

God heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds. Our God is a God who cares for the wounded, who cares for the broken hearted.

If that were not the case, God would not have sent his only son to suffer and to die as we suffer and die in order to bind up our wounds. When we talk about our wounds, of course, we recognize that the greatest wound of all is the wound that sin causes.

That separates us from God, it damages our relationships with other people, it hurts us in more ways than can be counted, and ultimately it leads to death. So the image of the baby in the manger is a more pleasant image than the image of the man on the cross.

[12 : 18] But we don't understand Christmas fully, we don't understand the message fully, if we don't understand that Jesus came to be killed. Why?

We find why Jesus came in Isaiah chapter 53. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

He came to take away your sin and mine. He was wounded, took the penalty for our sins so that we wouldn't have to.

He suffered so that you might be healed. that, of course, does not mean that we won't continue to struggle with sin in this life.

[13 : 27] It doesn't mean that we won't suffer still in this life, but it does mean that for us as believers the final outcome is secure. That there is coming a day when we will never sin or suffer ever again.

And it does mean that our sins are forgiven and that the greatest suffering of all, which is separation from God, will never happen to us.

And it also means that in the midst of the trials and tribulations of this life, and there are many, aren't there? God is at work binding our wounds and healing our broken hearts.

That's especially comforting to know around the holidays, because the holidays don't always feel like holiday cheer.

despair. We can find ourselves reminded of the people we love, who are with us no longer. We can find ourselves reminded of strained and damaged family relationships.

[14 : 50] Even when those around us seem so happy, we might find ourselves tempted to despair. that's when we need the reminder that our God is a God who binds up wounds and heals broken hearts.

He's the kind of God we need when we are wounded and broken hearted. A God who raises the dead, a God who invites us into his family, a God who offers us joy that does not depend on our circumstances, a God who can enter into the deepest and darkest corner of our hearts and work healing.

Whatever pain might be in your heart this morning, I know this, that Jesus can heal. Turn to him, ask him to heal what is broken and wounded.

I know that he answers that request. I know that personally because he has done that in my own heart and has healed things that I thought would never heal.

The gift of Jesus, brothers and sisters, it's a great gift from a great God who binds up the wounded and heals the broken hearted.

[16 : 22] God who does not know that he has done what does Psalm 147 have to show us in light of God's gift of his only son?

What would we say? That the gift of Jesus makes all the difference. That through Jesus, God builds up a people for himself, a family of sons and daughters, that he calls the outcasts, the broken, the sinful, the exiles, those who are lost, calls them to himself.

And that he binds up our wounds and heals our brokenness. How can that be? Because God gave the gift of his only son.

Because those who receive Jesus, as we read in our gospel reading for this morning, who believe in his name, are given the right to become children of God.

This Christmas season, when you think of the child in the manger, stop to think about what it means. Remember that God gave this child for you in order to make you his child.

[17 : 45] in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.