

14th Sunday after Trinity 2024

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Date: 01 September 2024

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[0 : 0 0] The church has a perpetual problem. This is the problem. God, the church cries out to God, God acts, extending mercy, the people are restored, and then their fervor dies, and the church ceases to look like the church and more like the culture.

And then the church gets to a spot where then they cry out to God for restoration. In his kindness, he extends mercy. They get restored, and so on and so forth, and so on and so forth.

It's the history of the church. It's the history of God's people. Before I continue on, let's ask the Lord's blessing, and then we'll continue in God's word. Lord, we ask that you will make us people of the book, that we would rest under your truth.

We would submit to it, bend a knee to it. Father in heaven, as we explore what it means to be a part of your people, the church, help us to have tender hearts to hear what you have to say to us this morning.

In Jesus' name, amen. I bring up this story as we were in our last psalm of the summer, because this psalm, Psalm 85, it's a lament psalm, but at its core, it's a psalm of crying out to God for renewal and restoration, crying out to God to do what only he can do and what he delights in doing.

[1 : 3 1] A bit of a story before we continue, just to illustrate the idea that the church has ebbs and flows. It's a bit of a yo-yo in terms of its religious fervor. In the early 19th century, there was a man named Charles Simeon.

He was at Cambridge. He came to faith, and he became an Anglican presbyter, a minister in the church. And you think, at least my grandparents, they would say stuff all the time like, in my day, things were a lot better.

Things were more holy. There was more devotion to Christ. And in my mind, I just think that that continued to grow, and it's only our culture that is bad.

But in Charles Simeon's day, he would make what we are going through look a bit tame. At Cambridge, where he was studying, he talked about being the only Christian that he met for three years.

Because we have younger ears here, there was all sorts of debauchery happening in broad daylight, drunkenness, all sorts of crazy actions that were happening on the campus, in the public areas at Cambridge.

[2 : 5 2] Religious fervor was at a big-time low. When Charles Simeon was ordained and he was given a church to pastor, he was locked out for a number of years.

Back, I guess in the day, they would have locks on the pews and you would own the key to unlock that lock and they would just keep it locked. And Charles Simeon was essentially locked out of his own church.

Religious fervor was extremely low. Evil had its day and this was some 200 years ago. But then renewal and revival started to take root in England.

And it spread, continued to spread, and reform began to happen. We'll touch a bit more on what happened with Charles Simeon, but suffice it to say, for him and really just the generation before with the Wesley brothers and then the generation after, saw incredible revival and a renewal of religious life within England.

But it was not without prayer. It was not without recalling the Lord's goodness, without confessing sins. It was not without rejoicing in God's goodness.

[4 : 12] And this is what our text gets to this morning. The psalm is a prayer and appeal to the Lord God to do just that.

A bit of a background. Not entirely sure, but almost all the scholars agree that this text was written after the return of God's people from Babylonian exile.

God had saved his people once again from exile, bringing a large portion of them back into the promised land, and only for them to fall into the same habits that plagued them from the very beginning.

So, in many ways, this text is a key point for us. Religious fervor is down in North America, in the West.

It truly is. Not in all parts of the world. In the global South, Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, parts of Iran, parts of Latin America, Christian fervor and devotion is up and growing.

[5 : 20] It's incredible. But in the West, it's not. So, this text is very timely for us this morning. And as I've said in previous weeks, we are studying a psalm, which means we ought to learn how to pray this psalm.

So, as we encounter this psalm, it'll help us to pray for the Lord's work in our day to reform and to revive the church once again. And we'll look at it, the text, and break it up into three sections.

To pray this text is to recall the Lord's past acts of salvation. To pray this text is to confess our sins and to seek renewal from the Lord. And finally, to pray this text is to rejoice in the God of salvation.

So, grab a Bible if you don't have it already. There's still a few Bibles on the back welcome table, so grab one at any time and follow along. Let's read verses 1 to 3.

Lord, you were favorable to your land, you restored the fortunes of Jacob, you forgave the iniquity of your people, you covered all their sin, you withdrew all your wrath, you turned from your hot anger.

[6 : 30] The people of Israel are recalling what God has done in the past. Everything here is past tense and six verbs are used to describe what God has done in the past, his acts of salvation.

It says that he was favorable to the land, to the people, to the nation, that he restored their fortunes, that he forgave their sins, he covered their sins, he withdrew his wrath, he turned from his hot anger.

the people, as I've mentioned, they were exiled not because of geopolitical issues that just kind of happened upon them, but because they ventured away from the Lord and this is what has happened, he gave them over to their enemies.

They were unfaithful to the covenant that God made with them at Sinai, the covenant that God made with their father Abraham. They did not want to worship God as their God, they wanted to worship the gods of the nations around them, so God said, okay, and he gave them over to the gods that they were serving, to the people that they wanted to be like.

That should have been the end of it. I mean, listen, this wasn't the first time Israel went about things this way, thumbing their nose at God, acting in a treacherous way. It should have been the end. I mean, growing up, I used to play video games a lot and I used to hate video games that didn't have continues.

[7 : 57] You die and it's over and you have to start from the beginning. That's what should have happened here. No continues. No second chances. No starting at level three because you died in level four.

They should be completely axed and yet, they appeal to what God has done in the past. Appealing to his covenant-keeping nature, that that is who God is and they are banking on the fact that God is unchanging.

Interestingly, the psalm opens with an address to the Lord, but in the original language it's not to other names of God like Adonai or Elohim, not necessarily generic names of the Lord, but lesser names in a sense than his covenant name.

But here, it opens up by an appeal to the covenant name of the Lord, which is an appeal to the covenant God who has made his covenant, reminding God of what he has done in the past.

They appeal to God because he is the covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. So they're appealing to the merciful history of God. And if you remember a couple weeks ago we looked at, I believe it was Psalm 83 and explored how God's history is actually our history.

[9 : 17] So therefore, this is very instructive for us on how to go about appealing to God when we need renewal for ourselves.

You see, for the Israelites, the past salvation that they had experienced of God informs their present prayers. It helps them to dispel errors in their thinking and pulls them out of a spiraling fall into discouragement and despair.

prayer. This is a key bit for us. Christine and I last week, we talked about the Lord's provision in our lives, specifically just around our needs and how in time and again the Lord has come through not in our timing but in his, which turns out to be the best timing.

one example, we were praying for something like six, eight months, some of you guys know this, I've shared this, but six or eight months with the kids in the morning, almost every morning, we figured we'd need a new vehicle sooner than later.

Our car was getting old. Nothing worked out in terms of the stuff I was seeing or there was a great deal and it was gone before we could snatch it up or even contact the person.

[10 : 40] And then I was with Joseph on my day off and our transmission just blew. I mean, it didn't blow up. Like, we're still alive, okay? But there was cranks and scrapes and grinds and it was like weirdo sounds and the car stopped moving.

And anyways, all I have to say is that night, I put a deposit on a car, I found one on Kijiji. Was it because my Kijiji skills are next level? No. Because God in his kindness and faithfulness provided.

And we were talking about that because, you know, there's other things that we need. So what do we do? Do we spiral into despair or do we recall God's faithfulness in the past knowing that he is faithful and unchanging in the present?

It's very important to recall the Lord's past acts of provision and favor and salvation in our lives. it's always a stimulant to more faith.

Always a stimulant to more faith. That's why reading scripture is a fantastic practice, not because it's scripture and it's the words of life, and it is, but because almost 50% of the Bible is narrative, and it's story after story of God's provision of the past.

[12 : 02] That is our past, things that have happened in history, but it's our history. And what it does is it stimulates our faith to trust in the God that is unchanging and is faithful today.

It's also why we ought to read Christian testimony and examples of missionary endeavors or stories of Charles Simeon or talk to one another and ask them to share instances in their own lives of how God has been faithful.

people. We'll stick around for coffee for 30, 45 minutes. It's nice. Small talk. I'm a fan of small talk. I don't think it's bad necessarily, but maybe enter a bit farther past small talk and ask the question, give me an example of how the Lord was faithful to you in the past.

And it might feel awkward, but get somebody to answer that question, or maybe you share it, and then listen and hear how God has been faithful to them, and I bet you there will be connections with areas in your life where God has been faithful to you, and what it will do is it will spur on and stimulate faith for you to trust in him in the present and in the future.

I'm telling you, this is the way it goes. This is the way it goes. As we recall what the Lord has done, we then have a basis by which we can honestly recognize, our present situation.

[13 : 32] And our present situation always calls for confession, because it's always proper to come to the Lord humbly confessing our sins, but especially in times of renewal and restoration, when we need him to break in a very special, significant way.

So, the second portion of this psalm teaches us how to confess our sins and to seek renewal. Look with me, verses 4 to 7. Blessed are, oh, that's, sorry, four here.

Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation towards us. Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations?

Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation. I mentioned the people of Israel has, they have run afoul of God so many times, and yet, the call of God is always to turn towards him.

God does not delight in the death of somebody who does evil, but rather that they would turn towards him and live. That is what he desires. And this is what he is calling Israel to, and this is what they are doing here.

[14 : 55] The sin of the people have caused God to be indignant towards them. That is what we see in verse 4, that they are recognizing God is angry, his anger, his just anger is burning towards the people because of their waywardness, their treason, their infidelity towards him.

He is betrayed, and his anger is righteous, and it's kindled, but God does not divorce his bride. Instead, he extends undeserved mercy, he seeks to restore and to renew.

They ask the question, will you be angry forever? Of course he won't. Likewise, will you revive us again?

The answer is obvious. Yes, he will. He does not cancel. He does not seek revenge. He is not petty. He is not vindictive.

Again, he does not delight in the death of an evildoer. He does not want their destruction. He extends mercy, extends mercy, extends mercy, delights in extending mercy, and undeserved mercy at that.

[16 : 12] God is waiting for confession of sin, for us to turn towards him.

And this is what we are seeing here. And if you struggle with thinking that God is ready to pounce on you when you do evil, think about the parable of the two sons that Jesus tells the father is waiting for the prodigal to come home.

He is scanning the horizon. His eyes are glued to the horizon, just waiting. He is outside, bending his ear to hear footsteps.

He is waiting for his son to come back. And he sees his son turn towards him, his son. Obviously, if you know the story, he is full of guilt. The father runs to him, clothes him, puts a ring on his finger, has a huge banquet for him, rejoicing that he has returned.

This is the God who we confess to. This is the God that we turn towards when we have been wayward and unfaithful.

[17 : 21] He is the one that will revive and renew. That is the Lord and his goodness and his kindness. But make no mistake, it is us and he helps us by his Holy Spirit, but we ought to turn to him and not presume that he will extend mercy to us, but appeal to his mercy, appeal to his character, appeal to his very person.

And what are we restored to? We are restored in order to worship. We see this in verse six. Will you not revive us again that your people may rejoice in you?

notice that the people recognize that their chief end in this restoration salvation game is not for their own benefit, but first and foremost for the Lord's renown.

Of course there is benefit to knowing the Lord and enjoying his goodness and his restoration, but first and foremost it is about his glory and his rejoicing in his name.

God of creation again deserves to be rejoiced by the people he has created as they experience his steadfast love.

[18 : 44] The Lord does this in the most wonderful way by not denying who he is, for God is what he does, and we'll unpack that in this next section.

Look with me verses 8 to 11, but we'll just read verse 8. Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints, but let them not turn back to folly.

I'll pause there. The psalmist knows that God despises the proud, but gives grace to the humble. He knows that God cannot deny himself as the giver of good things, that God is the creator of life, so therefore the psalmist on behalf of his people inquires of the Lord, expecting him to speak.

And this bit about God speaking peace, I mean, it's a beautiful line, but it harkens back to creation itself. God is the supernatural creator who creates everything out of chaos and nothing, bringing order to the world.

God is himself uncreated and he doesn't take materials that are pre-existing and creates what we have in this earth, this cosmos, but he speaks and things are created.

[20 : 10] And here, the peace that he extends to us, he speaks to us, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints. Just a couple things.

The estrangement that we have from God is not remedied by doing good works. It can't be remedied by having behavior modification.

Very important aspects to what it means to live in obedience to God is to grow in our faithful, obedient behavior towards the Lord.

But it can never remedy the estrangement that we have, because the estrangement we have, the odds that we're at odds with God, it goes deep, the roots go all the way down, it hits the very depths of our soul.

Therefore, God needs to speak peace to us, which is to say that he needs to speak a supernatural creation within us, taking a heart that is made of stone and making it into flesh.

[21 : 15] We have no ability to know and love and turn towards the Lord by our own strength, so he has to help us with that. And here, the psalmist is recognizing that a part of the salvation that we get to enjoy from the Lord is a creative act by the creator of all things.

You remember the first act of God in the pages of Holy Scripture is creation. And one thing I love about it is that God doesn't put on a carpenter's apron or a welder's smock or coveralls and take some pre-existing material and gets to work.

No, he just speaks. And the entire cosmos, the entire universe, everything that exists came into being. God just spoke. No more chaos, but order.

And interestingly, in Mark chapter 4, we see something similar. Jesus is in the chaotic winds and the waves with his disciples in a boat as he is crossing the Sea of Galilee and they cry out to him for salvation.

And he gets up and he says to the wind and the storm, peace, be quiet. And that same act of creation is on full display.

[22 : 37] And this is what is happening here. The psalmist is saying, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints. And then a warning, let them not turn back to folly.

Is this not what we desire? To have this estrangement with God remedied? To not turn back to our folly?

Is if you've lived long enough, and hopefully this isn't your experience, but if you've lived long enough, you get into some kind of issue with somebody that you love or you're friends with, and you become estranged with them.

And then a week goes by and you don't talk with them, and you don't remedy the situation, and then a month, and then maybe a year, and then maybe it's a decade. And you move on to an extent, but the estrangement is a monkey on your back.

You feel it. Something's wrong, something's not right, there's a relationship that is chaotic. You can pretend it's not a problem, but it's a problem.

[23 : 50] Do we not all wish to have no estranged relationships in our lives? God is offering this to us.

We are the ones who have wronged him, but he is the one who reaches down to us to remedy the situation. And not just with us in him, but as we come into a proper, restored, renewed relationship with him, our other relationships begin to look less chaotic and more orderly.

That's not a promise, by the way, that all your relationships will cease to be chaotic or estranged, but your heart will be turning towards restoration, not away from it.

the world begins to be a place where you want to extend God's order and his goodness and his mercy and his love and his steadfastness and his faithfulness and his righteousness everywhere.

Going back to Charles Simeon, so Charles Simeon, he comes to faith, he goes through a really, really difficult time trying to pastor this church. Eventually, they let him in after years and years and years, which is crazy to think.

[25 : 12] If you guys want to lock me out, I mean, that would be a horrendous experience for a week. He went on, you know, for years, but slowly, people were converted.

Slowly, this renewal started to take root in England, and not only did people come to faith, but Charles Simeon and a group called the Clapham sect, you can look them up there.

It's a wonderful testimony to the Lord's renewal movements in history. But this group of ministers, which included William Wilberforce, among others, they started evangelistic ministries like the Bible Society.

They started the Christian Mission to the Jews, among other things, and other missionary movements. They also started organizations that would eventually stop animal cruelty that mattered to them, to stop the transatlantic slave trade.

It really found its momentum in this group that were so touched by and renewed by the Holy Spirit that they extended the grace and goodness of God to every aspect of, of every sphere of their influence, every aspect of their society.

[26 : 30] And things changed. It was an unbelievable season in the church, church, going from darkness to light. You see, the blessing of God always extends out to include others who are also experiencing this estrangement.

So we get right with God, we get right with others, we tell people and bear witness to them about God's, his restoration plan, and it continues on.

This is the way the Lord works. Look with me in verse nine. Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him. The glory may dwell, that glory may dwell in our land.

The people of Israel, they want, they want God's presence back amongst them. And God's presence has always been amongst his people, first in the tent of meeting, the tabernacle in the, in the desert years, and then eventually the temple that was built by King Solomon.

And they, it seems that they want something similar to that, but, but this verse here, it's this prophetic, this, this prophetic announcement that there's something more that God has in store with his glory, with his presence amongst his people.

[27 : 52] It seems to imply that the, that the glorious presence of God himself would pay his people a visit, but then extend to all the nations. Interestingly, the, the word here, dwell, is the same Hebrew root word for, for the glory of God that came upon the mountain, Mount Sinai, of, when, when Moses went up to get the law, that it was the Shekinah glory, the, the unapproachable light, and this is what the text is getting at, that God is going to dwell amongst his people.

But will he be in unapproachable light? I think what this is, is it's pointing prophetically to Christ. Consider these two verses, Hebrews chapter 1, verse 3, he is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power after making purifications for sins, that is, his life, death, and resurrection, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high, John 1, 14, and the word, that is Jesus, became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, there's that term glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth.

You see what's happening here is God is promising salvation, and that his presence would again dwell with his people, but not like in the past, that he would take upon him humanity, take humanity up into him, and that God, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, fully man and fully God, there's the incarnation again, we talked about that last week, he would dwell among his people, and then his people would be transformed, renewed, and restored to him, and then this goodness and glory would be extended to Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth.

Once again, we see God's presence and salvation at work, extending and inviting and including all that would but turn to him.

His faithfulness is expressed in his mercy, and his righteousness will be satisfied in Christ Jesus. Verses 10 to 11, and we're going to wrap things up.

[30 : 13] Some of the most beautiful poetic words in scripture, this is how it reads, steadfast love and faithfulness meet, righteousness and peace kiss each other, faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky.

This is who our God is, and what I mentioned before that there's an appeal to God to not deny who he is, this is it, for God does not just do works, but he is what he does.

God is the creator, he doesn't just create. God does not just bring peace, but he is peace himself. God does not just extend steadfast love, he himself is love.

He's unable to be anything other than faithful. He has made promises, he will keep promises, he is righteous in all he does because he himself is the only righteous one.

So you see that God, that Israel rather, is appealing to God to not deny who he is because he cannot. So they don't presume mercy, but they say, God, do what only you can do.

[31 : 25] They are throwing themselves at the very character and person of God. God. And this speaks to us this morning because the renewal that we need and desire in our families and in our own personal lives, but in our families and in our neighborhoods, the renewal is not something that we can get, but a person that we find.

That is Christ our Lord. The psalm concludes like this, yes, the Lord will give what is good and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps away.

Like in the 1800s, in Charles Simeon's day, we live in what a political commentator, a guy named Aaron Wren, calls the negative world that we cease to have a place at the table as Christians that are genuinely trying to follow the Lord.

Our society has embraced the culture of death. And although there are wonderful redeeming things about our culture, by and large, it has turned away from God in a very, very, very obvious way.

We live in the negative world. Being a Christian makes us suspect. It makes us a force of ill and evil. So how ought we to respond?

[32 : 51] I think we need to respond by remembering who the Lord is and appealing to his very character. Verse 13, it says, righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps away.

I read, and I think this was Charles Simeon in the persecution that he faced, but he, I could be getting this wrong, but I think it was Charles Simeon. He said, listen, if I have to go through a bramble of hedges or a hedge of brambles, a very prickly bush, as long as I can get my head in and my shoulders to the other side, I'll get scraped up a little bit, but I'll be okay.

And he says, Christ, my head, has made the way for me. He has already gone through, and I simply am going to get scraped up a little bit. And here, verse 13 is saying that he himself has gone before us, he has made the way, and we are simply following him and being faithful because he was faithful to us.

So as we seek the Lord's face, we first remember what he has done in the past, we second, confess our sins, and then third, we rejoice in the God who delights in renewal and restoration.

A church that is not perfect, but is seeking to follow the Lord, it is an apologetic to the world that God is not dead, and that he is extending mercy to all that would turn to him.

[34 : 31] Friends, as we submit to and grow and rejoice in the incarnate God, it is bound to happen that renewal and restoration will take root in our lives and in our families and in our church community and will continue to extend and extend and extend and extend.

Let us pray for such a thing. Let us pray now. Lord, thank you so much for the examples from the past, both in Holy Scripture, but also in the history of the church, of your faithfulness and your goodness and your restoration and your renewal and your mercy that you have extended time and again to an undeserved people, but a people that you have committed yourself to.

A people that you have sent your son to die on their behalf so that we might live in him. Lord, help us to remember that Christ has already gone before us and that we will never suffer like he has suffered, but that we can suffer in part and it is a great joy to do so for your glory, for your name.

And Lord, help us to be brave as well. Lord, we live in a negative world, but here we have the very gift of life. Not a gift of life, not a way to heaven, but the way to heaven.

The way that we can have this eternal estrangement dealt with forever. So Lord, we ask that you would bless us as your people.

[36 : 05] We don't presume to receive your mercy, but Lord, we appeal to you to do what you delight in doing. And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.