

Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

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Date: 27 August 2023

Preacher: Rev. Daniel Avitan

- [0 : 0 0] Let's open with a word of prayer. Lord, thank you that we can gather this morning and open your word. Lord, this morning we desire to be drawn closer to you.
- Help us to navigate this life and to do it well, to live out our days, whether they be many or few, faithfully. Lord, trusting and hoping in you.
- We pray this morning that, like the deaf man in the passage in Mark that we just read, that our ears would be opened.
- That we would hear exactly what you would speak to us this morning about. And that we wouldn't just be hearing it, but we'd be doing it. That it would go deep in our hearts and we'd live out this truth.
- We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. If you have a Bible, turn with me to Psalm 71. We have two more weeks in our summer series in the second book of the Psalter.
- [1 : 0 3] If you don't have a Bible or you've got it at home, there's a stack at the back. Feel free to grab it at any time. Don't worry about distracting me. I have three young kids. I'm undistractable.
- That's not true. It feels, though, that I'm pretty good at not being distracted. Anyways, this week I had a great back and forth conversation super early in the morning with a buddy that lives in the Toronto area.
- He's very driven and successful. And we were talking about goals pertaining to fitness. He's a super goal-oriented guy.
- He's, it was a bit of a, actually, I shouldn't say it's so much of a conversation. It was like a borderline coaching session. It was, it was great. I love this guy. I've known him for years. He has some fantastic insight and goals.
- And one of the things that stuck out to me that he shared was how he has, and I found this actually, on one hand, incredibly admirable. On the other hand, I mean, I have it in my notes alarming.
- [2 : 0 6] I wouldn't say alarming, but I'll explain what I mean by this. He has this goal for when he's 90 years old. And the goal is that he would walk a full 18, play a full 18 with the clubs on his back.
- No cart, no hand cart that he'd be carrying the clubs on his back. And I just thought, that's great. I mean, I'd love to live to 90, let alone be able to play golf, you know, in such a way.
- I mean, you have to be in fantastic shape. And my friend is in fantastic shape. And I mean, he's a real stand-up guy. But I thought it was admirable for that reason.
- But I found it, I guess, alarming or troubling. When I thought about, I mean, my friend, and I mean, he would say this as well, he doesn't know what next year will bring. There's no possible idea what the future holds.
- We make plans, but we truly can't curate and plan out our life so well that will, in the case of my friend Dave, that he will find himself on a golf course at 90 with the clubs on his back.

[3 : 17] Like, it's impossible. Now, it might happen, and I really, really hope it does. But God forbid something bad happens to my buddy. And, I mean, one knee accident, or accident that messes up his knee or his back, or God forbid, takes his life.

And things are over. That goal is unachievable. It was a strong reminder that although we have great agency in this life, there are so many things that are completely out of our control.

There are so many things that we can't figure out, we can't direct or curate in our own lives, let alone the lives of those around us, our friends, our family members, our bosses, our subordinates, whatever it may be, our children, our friends, our neighbors.

And when we try to control things, things don't really turn out great, by and large. Especially when we try to control other people. We have lots of agency, but we also have a lot of things out of our control.

And if you live long enough, you realize that one of the things you cannot control is suffering. Suffering is a part of the human life. And it is something that in a very real way, if you live long enough, maybe not even if you live long enough, but if you just live, it is unavoidable.

[4 : 41] Suffering is something that touches us all. Certain degrees of suffering. Some people, it seems like it is a ton of suffering. Other people seem like it's easy street. But truly, everybody experiences some kind of suffering.

Our best vision for the good life, in many respects, is completely out of our control. And that's, by the way, like, I'm not naturally somebody who, like, has a 90 year, like, I'm 90 years old and I have a goal for when I'm 90.

That doesn't mean we don't plan things out. But we need to understand that our future is certainly not certain. We need to be honest with ourselves about that reality.

And also very honest with ourselves if that's a very jarring reality for us. So two things I think that we need to think about and consider when we're thinking about the future and how we want our lives to play out and what vision of the good life we want to engage in.

First is, what is the true vision of the good life? What does it mean to live a good life? And on one hand, I mean, it is subjective. You have your personal goals.

[5 : 53] It's a fantastic thing. I'm not poo-pooing that. But in an objective, general sense, what is the ideal life to live? That's the first thing to consider.

And the second thing is, when we fall short of that, how do we deal with disappointment and pain? In our psalm this morning, we find an older or elderly believer that reflects on the life of faith with Almighty God.

Now, the commentators, they, they're, you know, some people say this is clearly an elderly person, you know, praying the psalm. Other people are like, it's just a person that might be alluding to the future.

I'm going to go with the former. This is an older person, an elderly person in the faith, reflecting on a life of faith lived with Almighty God.

And in this psalm, we're going to see a vision of the good life. And that at the core of this good life is this faithful life of placing one's ultimate trust and hope upon the triune God, especially in times of difficulty, frustration, and danger.

[7 : 08] So, three things to glean from it. First, that we recognize our frailty and our inability to overcome hardships. And that's not to say every single hardship, every last bit of difficulty we can't overcome.

I'm saying in general, this psalm teaches us that we ought to recognize our frailty and our inability to overcome hardships. The second thing that teaches us is that we ought to have a trusting and hope-filled faith in the faithful, unchanging God.

Key to that, and we'll touch on it a bit, is that God makes promises and He keeps them. And that's what we put our hope and trust in. And then finally, the last thing that we can gather from this psalm is that we can truly endure to the end.

And that there is a way forward. Maybe a term that's fallen out of use, but this psalm will teach us to die well.

So, recognizing our frailty and our inability to overcome hardships, trusting and hoping in the faithfulness of the unchanging God, and finally, enduring to the end.

[8 : 24] So let's jump into it, starting in verse 1. 1. We're going to be jumping around in the psalm. We're not going to necessarily follow the linear progression of the verses, so jump with me to verse 4. Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel man.

Throughout this psalm, there's a recognition that life is difficult, and that there are factors outside of our control that can and often overtake us. In this case, we see three kind of categories here.

The wicked, the unjust, and the cruel. Maybe we can prevail against rude people and unjust treatment at work, or even the odd bit of gossip.

That is, in a sense, gossip can be a form of cruelty. We can overcome it, but such things are not the exception, but the rule. Oftentimes, we get leveled in degrees by the things we experience, the injustice that we hold on to, and we nurture in our hearts of being overlooked, or being falsely accused, or misunderstood.

[9 : 49] And we nurture that, and we hold on to that, and it becomes bitter. When we experience some form of cruelty, it is very hard to get over cruelty.

The fact is, if we're honest with ourselves, these are the types of things that can totally take us out of proper functioning, and maybe all of us, to a degree, deal with a degree of mental trauma that we have lived through, that we have struggled with in the past, and that follows us.

And I say trauma, and maybe it's too heavy of a word, maybe it's not. But nevertheless, wickedness, and injustice, and cruelty aren't things the average person can easily overcome.

Maybe, again, here and there, but if it becomes an ongoing pattern that you experience, it is a very difficult thing to overcome.

The reality is, evil exists in droves, because the human heart is bent towards the self. This is why people are cruel. This is why people are unjust.

[11 : 02] This is why people can be wicked, because there is this focus on the self. The heart of men and women have an unquenchable desire for more, and a pride that can't be satisfied.

Sometimes, as in this psalm, we find ourselves on the receiving end of such things. But let us not somehow think that we are not agents of injustice at times.

Or we have not been cruel. Maybe not, you don't want to admit like you've been cruel, but you've been a bit mean. Maybe you have been very unkind to somebody that borders on wickedness.

That you seek revenge, and you do certain things, or you say certain things, or you wish certain things upon people that is not in keeping at all with a heart of love and selflessness, but of selfish gain and wickedness, injustice, and cruelty.

We can be the wicked, unjust, and cruel man. That is why it is vitally important, and I mention this on purpose as we confess our sins together, to confess our sins.

[12 : 16] To not try to hide, or excuse, or as the prayer book says, cloak our sins before Almighty God, to be honest with Him. We are prone to this, and confession, therefore, is a wonderful blessing for us to bring into the light what we hide in the darkness.

Let's continue on. Look with me at verses 9 to 11. It says this, If verse 4 has a picture of a wicked, unjust, cruel man, now we see that this man, this enemy, is one that conspires, and plans to pursue, and to overtake, and to abuse.

The psalmist is recognizing that he is susceptible to being taken advantage of. And this is certainly a problem in terms of how we treat our elderly folk in the West, or how they are treated, rather.

Elderly people are the target for scam calls up the wazoo. Every few months, you hear something on CTV, or on the radio, about a poor lady, or a poor man, who has been scammed out of a few tens of thousands of dollars.

It's a horrible thing. It's a terrible thing. We, again, I'm speaking in generalities here, we look to take care of our elderly by, by and large, pushing them away from us.

[14 : 09] And I'm not saying that every person that encourages their elderly parent or aunt or uncle to go into a retirement home is a monster.

I'm not saying that at all. But by and large, there is a push to let somebody else deal with that. And it's a very lucrative business to, to, to get into.

It's a very lucrative business that will drain people dry. And sometimes it very well is this situation where people are taken advantage of.

In recent years, people are encouraged, given the option rather, to, to end life early and on their terms.

And sometimes it's by families so that they can get control of the estate. Our elderly people are susceptible to conspiracies of, of, of, of takeover like we see here in verses 9 to 11.

[15 : 18] It's very unfortunate that there, there's great fortunes to be made by taking care of, or by taking advantage rather, of the sick and the weak. And this is evil in God's eyes and such schemes harm people because they treat them as commodities and, and, and people that are made in God's image are not to be treated as such.

So, in a very real way from our youth to adulthood to our elderly years, there is a great reality of, of our frailty be put, being put on full display when hardships come, when people conspire to, to rob us or undercut us or treat us unjustly.

It is something we experience in all aspects of our lives. and it leads us in a sense to our second point, but before that, even the strong among us will one day, you know, will deal with the reality of becoming physically frail and having our strength spent.

Recognizing that we are frail is again such a critical part to living the biblical vision of the good life and this again leads into our second point because it helps us to live a life of truth, knowing our limitations and therefore recognizing our need.

And what are we in need of? We are in need of help and deliverance and salvation and somebody to stand on guard. So the second point, trusting and hoping in the faithfulness and reliability of the unchanging God.

[16 : 59] We'll look at verses 1 to 3. In you, O Lord, do I take refuge. Let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me.

Incline your ear to me and save me. Be to me a rock of refuge to which I may continually come. You have given the command to save me for you are my rock and my fortress.

So although, I mean, we'll read a few more passages, but first, I mean, although our frailty must be understood and acknowledged, this psalm teaches us not to dwell on that primarily.

Notice that the focus throughout the psalm is on God, His strength, His ability to save, how He fights on our behalf, on behalf of His people, His faithfulness to His promises that He has made, His unchanging goodness, His rock-solid reliability.

The focus of Psalm 71 isn't so much of the evildoers attacking me, it is about how God will save. Time and time and time again.

[18 : 03] We've read verses 1-3, verses 5-8, For You, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth. Upon You, I have leaned from before my birth. You are He who took me from my mother's womb.

Continuing on, I have been as a portent to many, but You are my strong refuge. Continues on in verse 12 and following, O God, be not far from me.

O my God, make haste to help me. May my accusers be put to shame and consumed with scorn and disgrace. May they be covered who seek my hurt.

My mouth will tell of Your righteous acts, of Your deeds of salvation all my day. With the mighty deeds of the Lord, I will come. Continues on, verses 19, Your righteousness, O God, reaches the high heavens.

You who have done great things, O God, who is like You? How can we possibly dwell on our frailty when we have before us an almighty God?

[19 : 09] It is God who saves. He is the true actor in our times of calamity, in our times of hardship. It is He who delivers. That's why I say, I mean, even the strongest of us who can withstand injustice, can only withstand to a degree, can only fight the wicked and the cruel to a degree.

But God is able to win the day all the day. He is always reliable. He is always steadfast. He is always doing great things.

And what is our part? To trust and hope in Him. And that comes to an expression in prayer and praise that is rooted in the history of God's covenant faithfulness with His people.

What do I mean by that? Simply that God has made a promise to us that He, through Jesus, will always, always stand guard against His people.

That He will never leave us or forsake us. And what do we, how can we trust that? Well, because look what He's done in the past. He has created all things and when things go awry and backwards and things start to get bent out of shape and misfigured because of sin, He constantly saves.

[20 : 29] When His people get sold into slavery, what does He do? He saves. When the people get exiled to foreign lands because of their own sin and their enemies descending upon them, what does He do?

He saves. This is what God does constantly. This is the history of our scriptures. This is our heritage. So we look back and that gives us the energy, the fuel, the faith to trust Him for the future.

Because if this is the God that we serve and He is unchanging, my goodness, that same God is with us, for us, right now. this psalm quotes at least three different psalms, 22, 35, and 70.

It has a reference to Moses' song at the Red Sea at Exodus 15. I mean, this psalm, in a very real way, is a psalm that delights in God's Word and God's salvation of the past that is then used to trust Him for the future.

So, it helps us to see that there is a great benefit in knowing God's Word but also praying God's Word.

[21 : 45] To know God's Word, to have it go deep inside our hearts that it may be the thing we think about throughout the day that we teach to our children that we meditate upon.

This is easier said than done in an age of distraction but, friends, we take baby steps. We incrementally grow. We don't make this huge change overnight.

It's what Eugene Peterson calls a long obedience in the same direction. And we have each other to help us. To know God's Word and to pray God's Word.

And, friends, what will be the result? Our outer selves, it says in 2 Corinthians 4, will waste away but our inner souls will be strengthened day by day.

That Christ Himself, He says that men, men and women, humans, can't live by bread alone but by what? By the Word of God, by every word that comes out of God's mouth.

[22 : 52] He quotes that in the desert when He is struggling Himself. and really, we understand the importance of God's Word because it is the way that He has revealed Himself to us.

It is for our benefit and growth that He has given us His Word so that we, first and foremost, may know Him. the way He has revealed Himself to us.

We recall His past, His saving work in the past and trust Him in the future. There's this interesting bit here and I wrestled with, you know, should I keep it?

Should I cut it out? But in verse 18, it says this about elderly folk in the faith. Verse 18, well, I'll go back to verse 17.

O God, from my youth you have taught me and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come.

[23 : 54] It's a beautiful picture of what this Christian life is, that it is to be lived out together, intergenerationally, that there is this beautiful opportunity for people of all ages to share the faith and to proclaim God's word and to encourage and to exhort younger people in the faith to trust the Lord, which is also a testament to you not having to do it all yourself.

How on earth could you do this Christian life, live it out faithfully without help? this will be the fuel in our tanks to live out this life of faith until the end.

Like I mentioned, Eugene Peterson calling it a long obedience in the same direction. This is what the Christian life is. It's trusting God for whatever comes next.

It's not about killing it non-stop home runs for the next 30, 40 years. It is about faithful, faithfully trusting God in the next steps, whatever comes about.

And he has promised to give us his Holy Spirit. He has given us his Holy Spirit so that we may have then the power to do so. It certainly isn't about hitting home run after home run.

[25 : 17] It's about getting on base. One of my favorite Blue Jays of all time, and to be honest, I can't say I'm a Jays fan like I was. I haven't watched a game in years.

But when I was a kid it was Paul Molitor. I don't know if anybody knows Paul Molitor. He played like three seasons with the Blue Jays but he won some World Series with them. But you go through his stats over the years and I did it just so I wasn't going to be called out if I told a fib.

But he kills it. He gets on base non-stop. He has a ton of hits. It's always in the hundreds every single year. Never, I mean, maybe he cracks 15 home runs in his best season.

But he gets on base. And it's singles and it's doubles and it's walks but he gets on base. And in many ways this is a formula for championships. This is a formula for faithful living.

It's to trust God in the small decisions in the everyday. everyday, it's showing up sometimes. It's not necessarily having these high, incredible, mountaintop experiences but it's faithfully trusting him in how we raise our children, how we approach our position at work, how we spend our money, how we think, how we pray, what we do.

[26 : 41] which leads us to our final point that this psalm helps us to know that we can truly endure to the end.

The long, faithful obedience in the same direction. I'll ask a question, are you preparing for your death? It's a terrible thing in one sense to ask people but it's also a beautiful thing to ask.

Will you die well? Let's read verses 18-20. to the end. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come.

Your righteousness, O God, reaches the high heavens. You who have done great things, O God, who is like you? You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will revive me again from the depths of the earth.

You will bring me up again. You will increase my greatness and comfort me again. I will also praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God. I will sing praises to you with the lyre, O holy one of Israel.

[27 : 54] My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to you, my soul also, which you have redeemed. And my tongue will talk of your righteous help all the day long, for they have been put to shame and disappointed who sought to do me hurt.

we will all experience pain and suffering. There's no way around it. I mean, verse 20 seems to imply that God is the one who is allowing us to go through the suffering that we go through.

It is the reality of how creation is bent and disfigured because of sin. However, no tragedy, no suffering goes without being used by God.

What do I mean by this? That God can transform our sufferings into beautiful acts of faith that bring him glory and that bring goodness and kindness and joy to those around us.

When we see somebody suffering well, it is an otherworldly act. It is something that doesn't seem at home in this world but something that is heavenly and divine.

[29 : 10] You see somebody suffering and not looking for vengeance but looking to the Lord for vindication. When Jesus says, give them your other cheek if they slap you on one side, give them the other cheek if they command you to walk a mile, go with them too.

There is something incredibly powerful about that and all of a sudden in Christ Jesus our pain and our calamities and our the injustices done against us can be used to be this to paint this beautiful picture of what heaven truly is like.

that justice will reign that kindness and joy will reign forever and that ultimately we take the very image of Jesus and we participate in his sufferings.

Jesus hangs on the cross completely not a just act at all complete injustice acts of cruelty by wicked men and he opens not his mouth and he suffers and he suffers well and he suffers on our behalf so that we may enjoy the presence of God the triune God forever.

And when we suffer justly sorry when we suffer injustice well we proclaim the very gospel of Christ with our lives we certainly back up what we preach.

[30 : 47] The triune God of creation who is perfectly good 100% reliable and trustworthy is not ambivalent to our difficult estate and this is a wonderful truth. He is very aware of our suffering to the end that he would send his son.

He takes upon himself all of our suffering and pain so that we may be rescued not just so that we can go back to some type of sinless state but rather that we could be welcomed into the very family of God himself.

Look with me again at verses 20 and 21 you who have made me see troubles many troubles and calamities will revive me again from the depths of the earth you will bring me up again you will increase my greatness and comfort me again whether or not the psalmist had a vision of the resurrection or not this is resurrection language that there is this picture of God taking us even if we are in the depths of death when we truly die that he will revive us but not just so we could be the same as before we died so that he could elevate us so that we would be perfect without blemish unable to sin unable to suffer that we are included into Christ's very body we get to enjoy his very presence this is I think what the text is getting at the psalmist is getting at when he says it in verse 21 you will increase my greatness and comfort me once again that we will share in the greatness of God the glory of God and we will know comfort upon comfort forever to live a life this way with this perspective is to live a well ordered faith filled hope filled life in the unchanging

God who has overcome death and everything that you will experience and what that does then is that helps us when the suffering comes to look beyond it to the life to come where we are promised an end to all evil that is the fuel we need to live out the Christian life to endure to the end to die well to die faithful friends I'll close with this Christ died a gruesome and painful life forsaken by God the Father so that we when we die can die well knowing that we no longer are forsaken but accepted by the only one who has conquered all of our enemies let us pray Lord we talked about death death and mortality and suffering and the difficulties of life but Lord as we talked about it let us not dwell there let us recognize surely that we are frail people and we are unable to save ourselves but Lord help us instead to focus on who you are you are the unchanging

God who saves to the end who has sent his very son to die in our place so that we may live forever in your presence enjoying love unspeakable Lord would you give us that perspective would you help us then to live faithfully and when we sin and when we fall short and when we find ourselves to be the cruel man the unjust man the wicked man that we would repent and turn back to you and Lord that we would live faithfully in the day to day and find ourselves whether you come back or when we are about to take our dying breath that we have lived well because you have given us the strength to do so help us all in Christ's name Amen