

“Living with Hope”

Psalm 107:1-9

All Saints Sunday, November 1, 2020

Rev. Charlie Berthoud

Covenant Presbyterian Church

Madison, Wisconsin

Online Worship—www.covenantmadison.org

Last week, we heard the words of Jeremiah, who encouraged people facing the hardship of exile that God has promised a future with hope.

This week, on this All Saints Sunday, we continue thinking about exile and hardship and hope, with the help of Psalm 107, one of the lectionary readings for this day.

“Hesed” is perhaps the most important Hebrew word in the Bible. It’s usually translated as “steadfast love.” Psalm 107 is a reflection on hesed, on God’s steadfast love.

In the psalm, there is a repeating pattern:

- the people experience adversity,
- the people cry out to God,
- the people are delivered or saved from their situation because of God’s hesed, God’s steadfast love.

The adversity in the various repeating patterns is varied: hunger, sin, storms, darkness. But God’s presence and God’s hesed, God’s steadfast love are constant.



Psalm 107 is an acknowledgment that life is hard, with hunger and sin and storms and darkness. But the psalm celebrates God's steadfast love which ultimately delivers us from our hardship and grief and sadness.

Psalm 107 is a summons to live with hope

Our reading is the first nine verses of this lengthy psalm. You'll hear an introduction and the first cycle of adversity, crying out, and rescue. Listen for God's word from Psalm 107.

- O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever.
- ² Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,
those he redeemed from trouble
- ³ and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.
- ⁴ Some wandered in desert wastes,
finding no way to an inhabited town;
- ⁵ hungry and thirsty,
their soul fainted within them.
- ⁶ Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress;
- ⁷ he led them by a straight way,
until they reached an inhabited town.
- ⁸ Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.
- ⁹ For he satisfies the thirsty,
and the hungry he fills with good things.

When we are together in the sanctuary for All Saints Day, we invite people forward to light a candle in memory of a loved one who has died. Today I have lit one candle, for all of us, as we remember.

Grief is hard any time, and it's especially hard now in the pandemic when human contact is limited.

Visits to hospitals and hospices are difficult if not impossible right now, and memorial gatherings are small if they happen at all. Many families are facing the adversity of separation right now, as they deal with sadness and grief.

I know the feeling of separation. My mother died six years ago, on Sunday morning, November 2, 2014 in Connecticut, where I grew up. When she died, I was right here in the sanctuary, wearing this white stole for our All Saints Day worship service—the very stole which she placed on my shoulders when I was ordained in 1991.



The doctors had told us that she had maybe two weeks to live, so I had a flight scheduled for that Sunday afternoon for Connecticut, to spend time with her in her final days. But she died sooner than expected, and I wasn't with her.

While I've always been sad that I wasn't with her physically, I did my best especially in her final years, to let her know that I loved her and I am pretty sure she knew that.

And mom was a lifelong Presbyterian, so I take great comfort that she knew about God's hesed, about God's steadfast love, the love that will not let us go, no matter what.

She knew the promise of Romans 8 that neither life nor death, nor anything else in all creation can separate us from God's love.

Today we celebrate God's love with communion, apart from each other physically, apart from the saints who've gone before us.

But we are together in God's steadfast love.

We experience this love in the life and ministry of Jesus, whose words give us hope in our time of grief and adversity. Jesus said:

- I am the resurrection and the life
- There are many rooms in my Father's house
- Remember, I am with you always

Thanks be to God.