**March 11, 2018**

**John 3:1-21; Psalm 107**

 “O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good; for God’s steadfast love endures forever.” Let us say so, for God has forgiven us and redeemed us, and gathered us together in this sweet hollow.

 Some of us wandered in from busy weeks, finding no rest in our days, and no sleep in our nights. Tired and seeking something to *really* feed our souls, we cried to the Lord in our trouble, and God delivered us from our distress. God led us straight to this community. Let us thank the Lord for God’s steadfast love!

 Some of us were depressed and anxious, overwhelmed with life. It seemed that no one cared or listened to our problems, and we did not listen to God’s words of love and grace and peace. When we cried to the Lord in our trouble, God saved us from our trouble. He brought us from darkness to light. Let us thank the Lord for God’s steadfast love!

 Some of us were sick. We couldn’t eat. We thought we would die, but when we cried to the Lord in our trouble, God healed us from our disease. Let us thank the Lord for God’s steadfast love!

 Whatever the circumstances, when we cried to the Lord, God came to our assistance. God brought each of us from the darkness of sin and trouble into the light of salvation and healing. For God did not create us or send Jesus into the world in order that we would be condemned and left wherever we are in whatever trouble we have. Instead, God created us for life, and sent Jesus so that we might be lifted up from our troubles.

The Psalm tells how God’s children are broken and needy. Scattered around the world, *they* did not find God, but God found them. They were lost, hungry, and afraid, then God led them into community. They were alone and anxious, exhausted by sin until God brought them into light and joy. They were sick and near death, then God healed them. They almost drowned until God calmed the storms and carried them to safety. In every situation, God went to God’s people. And in each and every situation, God found them and redeemed them.

Despite the heretical rumor of a vengeful and violent Old Testament God, the Old Testament is ripe with passages of a God who loves and cares for her children. Here is a God who goes out of his way to be with the people. A God who repeatedly finds and redeems God’s people. A God who wants nothing more than to restore the wellbeing of all people… and will do whatever it takes, make whatever sacrifice needed, to make that happen.

This is clear in the Psalm, but was more fully revealed in Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of Man. In Jesus, God gave us another chance, a new hope, and a new life. Just as in the Psalm, Jesus Christ found us drowning and calms the storm. Jesus Christ found us shackled by demons and sets us free. Jesus Christ found us wandering and lost and brought us into the communion of saints. And, just as in the psalm, Jesus Christ watches our misbehavior, and does what is necessary to keep us in the family. God reaches out to us in our brokenness and meets us where we are. We may have been lost but certainly are found now.

 In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus confirmed that he was with them because God **so** **loved** the world. God sent Jesus to save the world. For God’s people couldn’t escape the darkness on their own. They needed to be carried into the light. Nicodemus heard about this light. As the Gospel writer told the story, Nicodemus came to Jesus under the cloak of night, literally and metaphorically wandering around in the darkness, searching for the light of the world. Nicodemus was a seeker. He wanted to know more and draw closer. He wanted a personal conversation with Jesus, when he could look into Christ’s eyes and see the truth for himself.

Jesus then referenced a story about Moses. Long ago, during the Israelites’ wandering in the wilderness, Moses made a bronze snake and put it on a pole. By looking into this serpent’s eyes, the people would be healed from a poisonous snakebite. That snake was “lifted up” – on the pole – to heal the people. The people looked up for healing. Through this very strange and long connection here, Jesus was appealing to Nicodemus’ pharisaic knowledge of scripture… As Nicodemus remembered the Israelites doing before, soon, the people would do this again. Soon, they would look up to see Jesus, their Savior, on a cross, above them. This sight will bring healing and salvation to the world.

Our prophet, priest, and king; our Savior and paschal lamb to be slain; Jesus Christ was telling one more way that he fulfilled an ancient promise in a new way. This is one more connection for well-read and learn-ed Jewish people; this is an invitation to salvation. This is a call to repentance and healing. For everyone who has lost their way, for everyone who has suffered, for everyone who is asking questions like Nicodemus and searching for something more, Jesus offers reassurance and an opportunity. Here is love. Here is healing. Here is belonging. Here is salvation.

Don’t get me wrong. There are still plenty of questions. There are plenty of reasons to keep pushing and seeking. There are plenty of reasons to cry out to God. Though, I think God is delighted by our persistence. We are *still* God’s children crying out to the Lord for help. We are still God’s children in need of salvation. Read any newspaper, listen to the sound of your own heart, and know that there are good reasons to be in deep distress.

“The holy Wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.” Perhaps, like Nicodemus, we cannot capture God, but we see glimmers of the light and know that is God’s wake. Perhaps, like Nicodemus, we will bring the light into our own darkness. When a new baby is born to an endangered species, when a terminal health condition goes into remission, when neighbors help neighbors after a storm, when the lowly are lifted up, when peace and justice come to be, then we know that God has rescued us from our distress. Then we remember that God so loved us. Then we remember that God did not condemn the world, but pursued us until we were saved anew.

Whether you have been drowning in your sorrows, chained by your sin, or gotten lost in a busy world, know this: God waits for you. God calls you back home. Here. We have cried to the Lord in our distress and God has delivered us. Let us give thanks to the Lord for God’s steadfast love! Amen.