

Sermon for February 19, 2017– 7th Sunday after Epiphany

Psalm 103 (NIV84)

Of David. Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. ² Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits-- ³ who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, ⁴ who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, ⁵ who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. ⁶ The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. ⁷ He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: ⁸ The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. ⁹ He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; ¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. ¹³ As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; ¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. ¹⁵ As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; ¹⁶ the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. ¹⁷ But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children-- ¹⁸ with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts. ¹⁹ The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. ²⁰ Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. ²¹ Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. ²² Praise the LORD, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the LORD, O my soul.

In another Psalm King David once wrote: “Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever.”¹

Now, I can understand David’s desire to always praise the LORD, but there certainly are times when we don’t feel like doing that, aren’t there? Maybe a close relative has died, and you just can’t seem to come to grips with why God allowed it to happen. Perhaps you were laid off at the worst time imaginable. Maybe you are struggling with a painful illness from which you can’t seem to find any relief. Yes, I am sure that we could all probably point to different times in our life when we just didn’t feel like “praising the LORD.”

But, brothers and sisters in Christ, it’s especially at times like these that we need to praise the LORD. Why? To be reminded of his goodness, so we can have hope. But how can we even begin to praise him when we don’t feel like it? Let us look at Psalm 103 to see how, under the theme: **Praise the LORD:** 1) *Remembering all the benefits he offers you,* 2) *which flow from the goodness of his nature.*

Part 1: Remembering all the Benefits He Offers you,

Our sermon text begins with King David calling upon his soul and entire being to praise the LORD. Why? Because of all the *benefits* (that is, good things) the LORD shows his people. And what are these benefits? David lists them:

Praise the LORD. . . who forgives all your sins.

This is by far the greatest benefit the LORD offers you. Just think of what it means! Each of us is carrying spiritual baggage - sins we committed in the recent or distant past - the thoughts of which burden our souls immensely. We might wonder how God can forgive us, when we have a hard time forgiving ourselves.

But listen to what God says in his word: “the LORD forgives all your sins.” Regardless of how numerous or horrible your sins are, they have all been crucified with Christ on the cross. Don’t let feelings of guilt, regret and despair beat you up over sins for which you have already repented. Look at the cross and rejoice! God has completely forgiven you in Christ.

Praise the LORD . . . [He] heals all your diseases.

Remember this anytime you face any sort of physical discomfort or illness. Your Savior is in control. In His good and gracious time, he will either make you physically healthy, or deliver your soul from this veil of tears to his side in heaven (which, in all honesty, is better by far).

But even more important than healing you physically, the LORD heals you spiritually. Do you remember the story about the lame man lowered on his mat in front of Jesus?ⁱⁱ The first thing Jesus said to him was: “Friend, your sins are forgiven.” Why did Jesus do that? Because He knew that the man needed this spiritual assurance even more than being physically healed.

And what is true for the lame man is true for all of us. When seriously ill, you may certainly find yourself wondering about your relationship with God. Are you really at peace with Him? Are you sure that you will go to heaven if you die? Whenever thoughts like these come into your mind, seek Jesus in prayer – laying all your worries at his feet. Then take the medicine of his Gospel, through which he will heal all your cares, doubts, and concerns by reminding you of his forgiving love and promises; for. . .

[He] redeems your life from the pit.

To redeem means to buy back. And whom did Jesus buy back for God? You. Jesus purchased your body back from the grave and your soul from hell. What payment method did He use? Not gold or silver, but his Holy precious blood, and his innocent suffering and death. Jesus *redeemed* you, and because of this fact you don’t have to fear death. Why not? Because he will raise you from the dead on the Last day – just as he promised.

[The LORD] crowns you with love and compassion.

Everything God does – including the evil he allows in your life - God does out of love for you, as the Scriptures say: *we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who*

*have been called according to his purpose.*ⁱⁱⁱ Do you want proof that this is true? Then, look at the cross and consider what the Bible says: *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*^{iv}

[The LORD] *satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

Whenever you feel beaten down, defeated or in despair, remember Jesus' invitation: “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*”^v Go to Jesus in prayer and read his Gospel promises. Remember the declaration he made at your baptism: that you are his dearly loved child – forgiven, holy and precious in his sight. Remember his promise to be with you throughout your life – strengthening and upholding you as you cling to him in repentance and faith. Make use of his Word and sacraments, and you will find rest, renewal and a reason to be joyful – even when days are dark and our earthy future looks grim. Praise the LORD – remembering all the benefits he offers us, all of which flow from the goodness of his nature.

Part 2: . . . which flow from the goodness of his nature.

⁶ *The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.*

The LORD is not deaf to the cries of his hurting people. He sees how the devil and world oppress you – trying to burden you with guilt, or persecute you because of your faith. The LORD sees and helps. How? First of all by reminding you that, through faith in him, your sins are forgiven. There is no reason to feel guilty any longer. Secondly, he reminds you that He is in control. What he says will come to pass. He will judge this earth with justice – punishing all who refused his forgiveness by refusing to turn to him in repentance and faith.

But until that day, he wants you to be patient – remembering that *the Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*^{vi}

Do you want a prime example of God’s loving patience, then look no further than the example of Israel.

⁷ *He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel.*

God chose the nation of Israel out of pure grace. He performed many mighty miracles in their presence and blessed them with His Word and presence. Despite all this grace, the Israelites showed themselves to be a stubborn people – constantly falling into sin and rebelling against him. Yet, even in this, the LORD was patient. Yes, He did punish them for their sins, but even this punishment was meant for their good – to lead them to repent. And when they repented, he forgave and restored them – all according to the goodness of his nature.

⁸ *The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.*

The most definitive proof of this fact is seen in Jesus, and the lengths he went through to save you! Yes, the LORD is abounding in love - even if he sends suffering or sorrow into your life. When the LORD disciplines you, he always disciplines you in love – teaching you to let go of this world and cling to him. But, even in the midst of such discipline you can be sure that:

⁹ He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; ¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

Can you imagine if God did treat us as our sins deserve? We would be in hell forever! But, praise God, our LORD Jesus Christ made that payment for us.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

How far is the east from the west? Infinitely far. And so infinitely far removed are you from the condemnation your sins had earned. Just think: those sins you repented of but whose memory keeps bothering you - those sins are gone from God's sight. Having forgiven you himself, the LORD gives you the permission to forgive yourself!

¹³ As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; ¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

God always has compassion on his children. And who are they? They are you – everyone who, through repentance and faith, clings to Christ in love. The LORD knows your weaknesses and mortality. He knows the spiritual enemies you face better than you do. He knows that you need his help, even if you don't always realize it yourself. And, like a good father, he is there to help you in love.

¹⁵ As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; ¹⁶ the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.

We often live our lives as if every little thing on this earth – from the clothes we wear, to the politicians we voted for, or the sports we follow – are of the greatest importance. The truth is that they are all meaningless – temporary things that come and go.

The only thing that truly matters is your relationship with your LORD. Why?

[Because] from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children-- ¹⁸ with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

No matter how difficult life may be on this earth, the LORD will never withdraw his love from the one who fears him: that is, the one who clings to the LORD in repentance and faith. Such a person is covered with Christ's righteousness. God will watch over him and his family with great love and concern – granting eternal life to all who believe in him.

¹⁹ The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: consider how blessed you are compared to all the other religions and peoples of this earth. You have an intimate relationship with the one who actually rules over heaven and earth. Your LORD reigns supreme, and from his supremacy he promises to work in all things for your good.

So, let me go back to the question I asked at the beginning of this sermon: how can you praise the LORD when you suffer any sort of depression, pain or loss? Well, when you consider the hope God offers us through faith in the Gospel, how can you not praise him? The almighty LORD loves you and will keep all the wonderful promises made with you in Scripture. Study those promises and hold on to them in faith. Then you will be able to join King David saying in any and every situation:

²⁰ Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. ²¹ Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. ²² Praise the LORD, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the LORD, O my soul.

Amen.

ⁱ Psalm 145:2 NIV84

ⁱⁱ cf. Luke 5:17-26

ⁱⁱⁱ Romans 8:28 NIV84

^{iv} Romans 8:32 NIV84

^v Matthew 11:28 NIV84

^{vi} 2 Peter 3:9 NIV84