

Sermon for August 2, 2015 – 10th Sunday after Pentecost

Psalm 84 (NASB95)

Theme: **The LORD has made Immanuel a place where . . .**

- 1) *We find a home with the LORD. (1-4)*
- 2) *We are strengthened for our journey through life. (5-8)*
- 3) *We receive divine grace and glory. (10-12)*

For the choir director; on the Gittith. A Psalm of the sons of Korah. ¹ How lovely are Your dwelling places, O LORD of hosts! ² My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. ³ The bird also has found a house, And the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts, My King and my God. ⁴ How blessed are those who dwell in Your house! They are ever praising You. Selah. ⁵ How blessed is the man whose strength is in You, In whose heart are the highways to Zion! ⁶ Passing through the valley of Baca they make it a spring; The early rain also covers it with blessings. ⁷ They go from strength to strength, Every one of them appears before God in Zion. ⁸ O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; Give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah. ⁹ Behold our shield, O God, And look upon the face of Your anointed. ¹⁰ For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness. ¹¹ For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly. ¹² O LORD of hosts, How blessed is the man who trusts in You!

Sometimes we don't appreciate what we have until its gone; but by then it's too late! This is why it's good to set aside specific events - like anniversaries – to recognize all the blessings God offers us in special people, places and events so that we do not lose them through neglect.

This year marks our congregation's 150th anniversary. Our church is truly a great treasure from the LORD – one that we should esteem highly. Why? Because, as we will learn, **the LORD has made Immanuel a place where . . .** 1) *We find a home with the LORD.* 2) *We are strengthened for our journey through life.* 3) *We receive divine grace and glory.*

Part One: We find a home with the LORD.

Our sermon text, the 84th Psalm was written by a son of Korah. We don't exactly know what his particular situation was, but it seems as if he, for some reason or another, was prevented from visiting God's temple. With a longing heart, he remembers all the blessings the LORD offers through his house.

He writes: *How lovely are Your dwelling places, O LORD of hosts!*

In Old Testament times, the LORD commanded his people to come to one specific place to meet with Him: the temple in Jerusalem. There the priests, by their service, would foreshadow the mediation and sacrifice Jesus would accomplish on our behalf. God designed his temple to be both a prefigurement of heaven and a symbol of the Holy Christian church. There was only one old Testament dwelling place for God, and yet look, the Psalmist writes: *How lovely are Your dwelling places.* (Did you notice the plural of "places"?)

Jesus once said: "*Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.*"¹ God's dwelling place, therefore, is no longer limited to one specific location. He promises to be wherever people gather together in His name. One of those places is right here!

Yes, for 150 years Immanuel has been a lovely place where God dwells. How do we know he's here? Because God promises to be wherever his Word is preached and sacraments administered according to His will.

The Psalmist continues: *My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.*

Do you have the longing for the LORD that the Psalmist expressed – where your whole being desires to be with God? You should – considering all the amazing encouragements the LORD offers us through His Word and Sacraments. Sadly we must confess that - even though our spirit is willing - our flesh is often weak.ⁱⁱ Our sinful heart easily gets bored with God's Word. It doesn't want to invest time in learning about God's works and will. Because of the weakness of our sinful flesh, we easily neglect the wonderful blessings God offers us through this congregation's ministry – and if we continue down such a path unchecked, we would soon lose both our faith and salvation.

Oh, how sad is our condition when this happens! If we would spend more time examining our hearts in the light of God's law and Gospel, we would realize how foolish we are. The Holy Spirit would open our eyes to see the great love and forgiveness he offers us through his means of grace. We would rejoice in the Church – finding in it a home for our soul.

Our Psalm continues: *The bird also has found a house, And the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts, My King and my God.*

Every sacrifice the Israelites performed on the temple's altar pointed forward to the great once and for all sacrifice Jesus would make on the cross for our salvation. Therefore, the birds making a home and laying their young at the altars of the LORD is a poetical way of saying that the LORD does not chase anyone away who approaches Him with a repentant heart. He happily allows everyone to build his life on the sacrifice Jesus offered up for us on the cross. Blessed is the man or woman who does this. Blessed is every parent who places their children in Christ's arms - bringing them up in the instruction of the LORD. They will live at peace with God and under his great protection. This is why the Psalmist says:

How blessed are those who dwell in Your house! They are ever praising You.

A home is something more than just a place to run to in times of danger. It's the place where you live and love being. Blessed are those who dwell in the LORD's house – who have His Church as their home. Their they will find spiritual joy and rest. They will see Christ's forgiving love for them and share that love with others.

By God's grace, Immanuel Lutheran Church is such a home for believers. For 150 years, the LORD has mercifully kept our congregation faithful to him in the administration of his word and sacraments. These means and God's blessing are what has transformed this lowly congregation into His house. Blessed are those who find a home here with the LORD, for they will also receive strength for their journey through life.

Part Two: We are strengthened for our journey though life

How blessed is the man whose strength is in You, In whose heart are the highways to Zion!

The Jews of Old Testament times had to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem on certain festival days (like the Passover) to rejoice in God's deliverance. Some viewed this pilgrimage as a burden, but believers set their

heart on the LORD - looking forward to worshipping him at his temple.

Brothers and sisters in Christ our life is like a journey. Blessed are those who embark on it in the strength of the LORD: always looking to Christ in faith and keeping their eye on the glorious salvation He won for us. As we look forward to worshipping the LORD in the eternal, heavenly Zion, we understand the importance of God's earthly temple (his Church) - taking every opportunity we can to meet him here in worship.

Passing through the valley of Baca they make it a spring; The early rain also covers it with blessings.

This verse is extremely difficult to understand – mainly because it contains a complex play on Hebrew words that can't be translated into English. The basic meaning is this: Even though our journey passes through times of hardship and trial (the word "Baca" sounds like the Hebrew word for weeping), the Lord turns these difficulties into blessings. He works in all things for the good of those who love him – using even the worst of times to draw us closer to him and His Gospel.

They go from strength to strength, Every one of them appears before God in Zion.

No matter how weak a believer seems in life due to the sorrow he may have to experience, the LORD always strengthens such a person through the ministry of the Gospel that He has entrusted to his Church. The Word and Sacraments constantly connect us with Christ's forgiving love and wonderful promises. Through these means the LORD wipes away all our sins and tears - helping us on our journey and giving us the certain hope that we will appear before His merciful throne in heaven to receive the eternal life he promised to all who hold on to him in faith.

And the LORD will make sure this happens. Christ's cross convinces us of this fact! And so we pray with the Psalmist: *O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; Give ear, O God of Jacob!*

Brothers and sisters in Christ: the LORD has made Immanuel Lutheran Church His dwelling place, where He strengthens us for our journey through life. He accomplishes this through the Gospel proclaimed at every church service and Bible class. He hears all the prayers we offer up on each other's behalf, and uses us to encourage each other to find strength in him as we travel life's road towards our heavenly Zion. There we will receive the full grace and glory that we possess now by faith.

Part Three: We receive divine grace and glory.

The Psalmist prays: *Behold our shield, O God, And look upon the face of Your anointed.* Israel's anointed shield was its king who not only protected God's people, but also served as a symbol of the coming Christ who would shield all believers from every evil – delivering them safely through this life home to heaven.

And so we pray that God the Father would listen to His Son (as He intercedes on our behalf) and that He also listen to every prayer Christ's Church offers in Jesus name. And why should he? Because we – the Church - are the body of Christ on this earth through whom Jesus works to accomplish His will. Recognize this truth and rejoice in the fact that when God looks at us, he sees his Son and loves us. Yes, it is good for us to belong to his Church – to be in God's presence – as the Psalmist says:

¹⁰ *For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.*

Yes, even the lowest position in God's kingdom is far better than living outside of it: at peace with this

wicked world. No matter how glorious and enduring this evil earth may seem, the Bible says: *The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.*ⁱⁱⁱ

And why will the man who does the will of God (which is, to believe in Jesus) live forever? Our Psalm tells us: *For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.*

What a beautiful promise! The LORD, who we meet in this place every time we gather around his Word and sacraments, is present as our life-giving light – showing us the way of salvation. He is present to shield us from the devil, world and our own sinful natures. He showers upon us the Gospel of his undeserved love and bestows on us the great glory of being adopted into his family of believers. He is our Father, and we are his dearly loved children. He withholds no good thing from those who believe in him – giving us everything we need in life so that we can spend eternity with Him in glory.

O LORD of hosts, How blessed is the man who trusts in You! Yes, how blest are those who hold on to Christ in faith. And here's the thing: this faith is not something we can discover or retain on our own. It is God's gift – worked in our hearts through the preaching of the Gospel. And where do we find that Gospel? We find it in every church that rightly teaches God's Word and administers His sacraments. The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit is wherever these means of grace are rightly used. By God's grace, Immanuel has been such a place for the past 150 years!

Brothers and sisters in Christ – we often don't treasure the things we ought until they are gone. Let this not be the case regarding our church. Rejoice in the wonderful blessing our congregation is and make use of every opportunity God gives you to come here to meet with Him. Why? Because **The LORD has made Immanuel a place where . . . we find a home with Him, we are strengthened for our journey through life, and we receive divine grace and glory.**

May the LORD continue to grant his favor upon us, that we may always remain faithful to Him – rejoicing in all the he accomplishes both in and through us. Amen.

ⁱ (Mat 18:20 NIV84)

ⁱⁱ cf. Mat 26:41

ⁱⁱⁱ 1Jo 2:17 NIV84