

Sermon

March 20, 2022

Thirst, Longing, Hope

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Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

With distant memories of wanting to be an athlete of note, and memories of only being a so-so athlete, I enjoy following sports today. And I've certainly been surprised by the Seattle Seahawks trading Russell Wilson. And letting go their all-star talent Bobby Wagner. We will know as the future unfolds, how they will fill this void. And yes, I am waiting to see if this will be the year that the Mariners will actually make the playoffs! And amidst all of this local buzz about the sports scene, there is a national buzz that occurs during March, as we well know, and if you follow college basketball, that final tournament is front and center. And they call it "the road to the Final Four."

I think it's misnamed this year. For the road that preoccupies us is the road to Kiev, in Ukraine. And they also call it "March Madness" for all the basketball lovers around, knowing full well what that means. But the madness in this world consumes us, with the invasion of this independent country, and what seems to be lifted up as we watch, possibly in horror, over the news and the television, two words seem to rise up: One is strength. And the other one is courage, as we watch the citizens of that country.

But the pain, the pain in and from Ukraine, oozes into our consciousness and challenges us to reflect on how we live life together in this world. And we lay it upon this particular time of a church year, Lent, in which Jesus took a journey, took a journey down to Jerusalem; and we draw on the lessons appointed for this particular Sunday that are found in the Old Testament and in the Psalm that was sung for us beautifully.

I so much want to, I so much want to release those images from my mind. But yet I don't want to, either, forget the sights of the families that have been separated, of mothers and children of families apart, while their sons, their husbands, their fathers have gone off to fight in a war that they did not make. And I ache, possibly with you. I also recall the images of the bodies of the children, and in particular of the young mother who they gave a Caesarian birth, and how that was given a moment of joy, only to learn a couple of days later that both she and her young daughter were caught in the bombing and killed.

There is a longing, there is a longing, as Isaiah says, there is a thirst. There is a thirst for relief. A thirst for newness.

And there have been moments of being uplifted by the strength of the human spirit, as choirs have gathered in public squares and sung the national anthem of Ukraine, or as a piano player pulls a damaged piano into that square and plays uplifting music.

And yet I am deeply troubled. I am deeply troubled about the gathering, about the gathering that took place in which the center of attention was Putin. Throngs of people in this arena, and he gave reference to a scriptural quote that made me wonder, that made me wonder even further that as many months before, many months before he set into an Orthodox Church in which there was a cross in front of that nave, and he bowed. Was it a political circus? Who am I to judge? But did it have a means just beyond that moment and a reflection within his own heart? It truly makes me wonder.

And yet we see over and over the cross being worn by those evacuees that are fleeing that, that bombed-out country.

In the words of our Old Testament, in the words of Isaiah, it is important to have some "backdrop" information, some history as to what led into these words. For we see where the prophet is speaking to God's people who themselves were captured by the Babylonians, and they demolished Judah, and Jerusalem, where their homeland was destroyed, and the people forced to leave. Sound familiar?

And possibly God's children, whom the prophet was writing to and speaking to, were filled more with skepticism, were filled more with questions about their thirst, than they were filling their lives with terms of faith. Second, and even third, thoughts of "God's providence and care" certainly lived within them. Understandable. Where do they go? What do they do with their heart's yearnings and in their thirst?

And yet I'm aware too, that the lives which we live today, here: there is a possibility that the pandemic will go longer than certainly we had hoped. As another variant seems to be on the horizon, will another booster be needed? And then, our own personal stories that lead us into longing, leads us into wondering: if a health diagnosis has an uncertain future and what will be that prognosis; or could it be a broken or breaking heart because of a relationship that has gone south, or that is failing, or completely failed? And could it be from a grief, that the void of which was left seems to linger and be so present.

And the prophet Isaiah said for those who thirst, that they are to come, that they are to come to a place to receive, and the effects of the destruction from Babylonia upon the children of Israel was so real, and the longing.

Words are easy. Could Isaiah's words be taken as "too little too late"? Could they be taken as "well I've got to say something. So, ah, this is what I'm going to say."? The road of longing is a road so often that is not short, the lingering thirst that lies within us that touches on the various existence of who we are, that road can often be long.

We listen. we listen to the words: "My word is faithful," the prophet writes. Oh, come. Oh, come and listen. Listen to a promise that's offered by our God. Let God stir your longing into hope.

And there's, there's a wonderful quote from Martin Luther who wrote, "everything that is done in the world is done by hope."

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In the first letter of John, we read these words: "God first loved us."

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And it's not that we must resist the bullies of this world, living among us in this community, or the bullies on a global scale, that inflict needless pain upon the innocent ones. And it's not that God does not have tears and sorrows when he sees what's occurring on the innocent ones, the bodies, and those who love those, those who are living in those bodies, but the tears of Our Lord certainly are very full, as they are with you and me, when we have those moments of thirst, and wondering, and longing.

We remember that God first loved us. Our Lenten journey is marked by Christ's journey from Nazareth down to Jerusalem. And it was a journey that Jesus took willingly, God's son, and that journey as we know so well, took him into the upper room where he instituted a gift of the Lord's Supper in his presence, as it's offered to us this day. And then from there, he went into the garden to experience the gosh-awfulness experience of betrayal. And then his journey took him to the cross, and there on Calvary, in the darkness of that Friday, we read in Scripture that he said two words, amongst others, he said "I thirst."

Our Lord Himself, our loving Lord, knows humanity. He knows you and me. He knows about human suffering. He knows about the need. And in His love for us, that was shown most clearly and so vibrantly on Calvary, he demonstrates that that journey was not complete, because his body was taken into the tomb and there, sin, death, and evil itself was swallowed up, was swallowed up because He loves us, because He cares for us, because he knows that there is hope. Hope that prevails. That it is a march away from madness. It is a march away, away from madness.

Let it grab us this day! Let us embrace it. And in turn, we are embraced by that resurrection, by that resurrection. And now, graced in God's sustaining love, our thirst and our longings lead us to the cross, and hope.

And hope.

Amen.

And now may the peace of God fill our hearts and mind, in Christ Jesus.