

Lenten Devotional March 23, 2022

Scripture

Psalm 147:1-11

1 Praise the Lord!
How good it is to sing praises to our God;
for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.

2 The Lord builds up Jerusalem;
he gathers the outcasts of Israel.

3 He heals the brokenhearted,
and binds up their wounds.

4 He determines the number of the stars;
he gives to all of them their names.

5 Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;
his understanding is beyond measure.

6 The Lord lifts up the downtrodden;
he casts the wicked to the ground.

7 Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;
make melody to our God on the lyre.

8 He covers the heavens with clouds,
prepares rain for the earth,
makes grass grow on the hills.

9 He gives to the animals their food,
and to the young ravens when they cry.

10 His delight is not in the strength of the horse,
nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner;
11 but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him,
in those who hope in his steadfast love.

Devotional

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In full transparency, this was originally, mistakenly, written as a devotional for Advent. Returning to it now with Lent in mind, I wonder what distinguishes these two liturgical seasons. I am reminded that Advent is a time of preparation; Lent a time of penance. In Advent, we await Christ's birth among us; in Lent, we anticipate Christ's death and resurrection. Both are also seasons of wandering and wondering. And what wisdom of the Church, what mercy of God, to realize we're likely to find ourselves lost in the wilderness more than once each year.

The Scriptures of Lent express the ways our lives groan under the weight of sin, both our own and other's. Reading through the first stanza of today's psalm, we see a picture of that sort of Lenten faith. The psalmist wakes up with a worn-down sigh, crying out to God with prayer and pleading before committing to the seemingly endless watch (147:1-3).

What are they watching for? Some sign that evil has been cast aside from sojourning with the God who has heard them (147:4). Some way to make penance, to be led into the way of righteousness they've strayed from (147:8). Some assurance that their afflictors will be made to bear their guilt, held responsibility for their rebellion against God (147:10). Again and again, the psalmist cries out with the language of lament. However, as is typically the case with a psalmist's lament, it also moves toward praise. "But let all who take refuge in you rejoice," they say, "let them ever sing for joy." Even amidst the constant longings of Lent, there is also, still, reason for sounding joy.

Prayer

God of Lent, who hears our cries as we watch and wait,
Cast aside the evil within us and within our world.
Lead us into righteousness, and under your refuge,
Lead us into joyful songs of praise.