

**SCRIPTURE READING: Psalm 13**

One of the questions that we ask when we lament and grieve before the Lord is “How long?” You hear that question in this psalm—as the poet cries out to God, he wants to know how long God will forget him, how long God will hide his face from him, and how long the enemy will be allowed to triumph over him.

It is notable that we never really get an answer to that “how long” question. What we do get in this psalm is a movement from grief to confidence: “I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.” That’s the journey that every heart must take, each at its own pace. Central to that journey is our crying out to the Lord: “Consider and answer me, O Lord my God.” As we cry to the Lord, he assures our hearts that we belong to him.

HYMN: “10,000 REASONS (BLESS THE LORD)” Myrin & Redman

Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul; worship his holy name.
Sing like never before, O my soul; I’ll worship your holy name.

The sun comes up, it’s a new day dawning, it’s time to sing your song again.
Whatever may pass, and whatever lies before me, let me be singing when the evening comes.
Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul; worship his holy name.
Sing like never before, O my soul; I’ll worship your holy name.

You’re rich in love and you’re slow to anger, your name is great and your heart is kind.
For all your goodness, I will keep on singing; ten thousand reasons for my heart to find.
Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul; worship his holy name.
Sing like never before, O my soul; I’ll worship your holy name.

And on that day, when my strength is failing, the end draws near, and my time has come;
soon, my soul will sing your praise unending—ten thousand years, and then forevermore!
Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul; worship his holy name.
Sing like never before, O my soul; I’ll worship your holy name.

PRAYER:

How long, O Lord, will you forget me? I know in my head that you haven’t forgotten, but everything around me shouts to my heart that you have. Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; light up my eyes and my heart. Do not let me sleep the sleep of death, do not let my enemies triumph over me, do not let your name be taken in vain because of what is happening. I have trusted in you and will continue to rest in your steadfast love, shown to me in the cross of Jesus Christ, in whose name I pray, Amen.

CATECHISM: Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 27

What do you understand by the providence of God?

The almighty and ever present power of God by which God upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty—all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand.

**SCRIPTURE READING: Habakkuk 1:1-11**

You'll notice that the prophet Habakkuk doesn't shy away from asking hard questions. In the first four verses, there are two questions that we all ask at times and in these times. First, he asks, "How long?" And it is the violence of this world that causes him to ask that question. As Habakkuk sees the flagrant breaking of God's law all around him, he shouts out, "How long shall I cry out to you and you will not hear?" But second, he asks, "Why?" Why does God seem to sit idly by while wickedness reigns? Why is there iniquity and wrong, destruction and violence, strife and contention?

What we should learn from this chapter is that God welcomes our hard questions and meets them at times with surprising answers. Sometimes those answers shock us—he is going to use the Babylonians to humble his people! That's unlooked for! But his answers ultimately are meant to bring us face to face with the Sovereign Lord whose steadfast love is trustworthy and true. In all of our questioning, God reminds us that we belong to him.

HYMN: "GOD MOVES IN A MYSTERIOUS WAY" *Trinity Hymnal* 128

God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform;
he plants his footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines of never-failing skill
he treasures up his bright designs, and works his sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread
are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace;
behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding ev'ry hour;
the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flow'r.

Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain.

PRAYER:

O Lord, how long shall we cry for help and you will not hear? How long will violence characterize our world? How long will injustice and iniquity, destruction and violence, strife and contention be the norm? It seems that you have allowed the events of these days to humble us, to cause us to look to you as the Sovereign Lord over all. Help us to see that in all of your mysterious ways, you are performing wonders meant to lead us by the hand to see your deep and abiding love for us. Above all, let us not look at this life blindly, but trustingly because we have come to know you through Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray, Amen.

CATECHISM: Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 27

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SCRIPTURE READING: Isaiah 40:25-31

The past couple of days, we have heard Scriptures where we have asked the questions. Here in Isaiah 40, God is the one asking the questions: To whom will you compare me? Who created these things? Why do you say that your way is hidden from God? Have you not known or heard?

Sometimes we need to hear God's questions—because these questions lead us to the truth about God. He is the Creator: the one who created the stars, calling them all by name, numbering them all the same. He is the everlasting God: there is no other god besides him. He is the one who was before all time and our time; he is the one who will be here long after we are gone to be with him in his presence. And he is the empowering God: those who wait upon the Lord find their strength renewed. When we are ready to falter and fall, God lifts us up, bears us up, enables us to run after him.

The creator, the everlasting one, the empowering God—that is your God! And you belong to him.

HYMN: “O LOVE OF GOD, HOW STRONG AND TRUE” *Trinity Hymnal 81*

O love of God, how strong and true, eternal and yet ever new,
uncomprehended and unbought, beyond all knowledge and all thought!
O love of God, how deep and great, far deeper than man's deepest hate;
self-fed, self-kindled like the light, changeless, eternal, infinite.

O heav'nly love, how precious still, in days of weariness and ill,
in nights of pain and helplessness, to heal, to comfort, and to bless!
O wide-embracing, wondrous love! We read you in the sky above,
we read you in the earth below, in seas that swell, and streams that flow.

We read you best in him who came to bear for us the cross of shame;
sent by the Father from on high, our life to live, our death to die.
We read your pow'r to bless and save, e'en in the darkness of the grave;
still more in resurrection light we read the fullness of your might.

O love of God, our shield and stay through all the perils of our way!
Eternal love, in you we rest, forever safe, forever blest.
We will exalt you, God and King, and we will ever praise your name;
we will extol you ev'ry day, and evermore your praise proclaim.

PRAYER:

Lord, sometimes I forget who you really are. I start to slip into the idea—unintentionally, unwittingly—that you are limited, timebound, weak: someone just like me. Thank you for reminding me that you are the Creator who brought stars into existence and who continues to sustain your world. Thank you for reminding me that you are the everlasting God, the one who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And thank you for reminding me that you are the empowering God, the one who dwells in me by your Spirit to give me fresh strength to meet each day. I bless you and praise you for these reminders through Jesus Christ, Amen.

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SCRIPTURE READING: Psalm 62

This psalm is the psalm that we need for the storms of life. Notice how the psalmist describes his trust in God before the storm comes. The first two verses are *descriptive*; David is describing what it is like to be dependent upon God alone—those who live this way “shall not be greatly shaken.”

But then, in verse 3, the storm comes. Enemies confront the psalmist—they attack him, they lie about him, they batter him, trying to knock him down. In the midst of the storm, what was descriptive before is now *prescriptive*—David exhorts himself to wait for the Lord in silence; to trust God as his rock and salvation; to affirm that he won’t be shaken.

After the storm is over, starting in verse 8, David calls himself and others (“O people”) to trust the Lord; to call out to him in trouble; to find God to be not only a confessed, but a proven refuge. He also urges us to consider rightly those who oppose us (they seem so powerful, but they are lighter than a breath), but especially our God who supports us—he is both powerful and loving. He will care for us and deal with our enemies because we belong to him.

HYMN: “HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION” *Trinity Hymnal 94*

How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!
What more can he say than to you he has said, to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

“Fear not, I am with you, O be not dismayed, for I am your God, and will still give you aid;
I’ll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand, upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.

When through the deep waters I call you to go, the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
for I will be with you, your troubles to bless, and sanctify to you your deepest distress.

When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie, my grace, all-sufficient, shall be your supply;
the flame shall not hurt you; I only design your dross to consume and your gold to refine.

E’en down to old age all my people shall prove my sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;
and when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn, like lambs they shall still in my bosom be borne.

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose, I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, I’ll never, no never, no never forsake.”

PRAYER:

Lord God, for you alone my soul waits in silence. From you comes my salvation—for you only are my rock and my salvation, my fortress and refuge. Though there are many things in my life right now that threaten to bowl me over and knock me down, you will not let them do so. On you rests my salvation and my glory. To you, I am pouring out my heart—my fears, my tears, my hopes, and my dreams. Through your Son Jesus Christ, I have come to know both your power and your love. You will never let me go. Thank you, Amen.

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SCRIPTURE READING: 2 Corinthians 1:3-11

While the Apostle Paul's letters often open with a "blessing" section, this one in 2 Corinthians is incredibly personal. He speaks of his own affliction, experienced for preaching the Gospel in Ephesus. At that time, he had felt burdened beyond strength; he had felt as though there was a death sentence over his head; he had felt like he was holding a large boulder in the middle of the ocean that was dragging him down to the bottom.

And yet, God had met him with comfort. Ten times in verses 3-7, you find variations of the word "comfort." And that comfort came to him through Jesus Christ. As Paul shared in Christ's sufferings, experienced for the Gospel's sake, he also shared in Christ's comforts, granted from the Gospel's store. But here's the thing: Paul goes on to say that all our affliction and comfort is not just for ourselves. Rather, when we suffer and know divine comfort, it is so that we might be prepared and equipped to comfort others who experience similar things with genuine Gospel comfort.

How does that shift the way you think about your afflictions? How does that shape your understanding of belonging to God?

HYMN: "IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL" *Trinity Hymnal* 691

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll;
whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, "It is well, it is well with my soul."
It is well with my soul; it is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blest assurance control,
that Christ has regarded my helpless estate, and has shed his own blood for my soul.
It is well with my soul; it is well, it is well with my soul.

My sin—O the bliss of this glorious thought!—my sin, not in part, but the whole,
is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more; praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!
It is well with my soul; it is well, it is well with my soul.

O Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight, the clouds be rolled back as a scroll,
the trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend, "Even so"—it is well with my soul.
It is well with my soul; it is well, it is well with my soul.

PRAYER:

O Lord, haste the day when faith shall be sight and the clouds be rolled back as a scroll. And until that day, Lord, give me eyes to see those around me who are suffering with whom I might share your comfort. For you have regarded my helpless estate; you shed your own blood for my soul; you have taken my sin—not in part, but the whole—and nailed it to the cross so that I bear it no more. Comfort upon comfort you have given me through this good news. Let me share the good news that Jesus saves sinners so that others might say, "It is well with my soul." In Jesus' name, Amen.

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SCRIPTURE READING: Hebrews 10:19-39

The preceding section in the letter to the Hebrews has been telling readers what is true about Jesus, our great high priest. If we would have read that section, we would have seen that Jesus is a better priest, offering better sacrifices and securing a better covenant. In the light of those truths, we have here a section of exhortation, telling us what to do in the light of what is true. And the section itself is bookended with the word “confidence” (10:19, 35). This confidence is not only a subjective sense of assurance, but an objective authorization—we have freedom, authority, and permission to enter God’s presence.

So, what should we do? We should draw near (10:22), hold fast (10:23), and consider how (10:24). We should draw near to God through Jesus Christ, day by day, week by week, pleading his blood and righteousness. We should hold fast our confession even when things around us might challenge our faith in Jesus. And we should consider how to stir each other up to love and good works. And central to doing these three things is regular corporate worship where we are encouraged by God’s Word to do these very things. This is what life is like for those who belong to God.

HYMN: “JESUS, THY BLOOD AND RIGHTEOUSNESS” *Trinity Hymnal* 520

Jesus, thy blood and righteousness my beauty are, my glorious dress;
'midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, with joy shall I lift up my head.

Bold shall I stand in thy great day, for who aught to my charge shall lay?
Fully absolved through these I am from sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

When from the dust of death I rise to claim my mansion in the skies,
ev'n then this shall be all my plea, Jesus hath lived, hath died, for me.

Jesus, be endless praise to thee, whose boundless mercy hath for me—
for me a full atonement made, an everlasting ransom paid.

O let the dead now hear thy voice; now bid thy banished ones rejoice;
their beauty this, their glorious dress, Jesus, thy blood and righteousness.

PRAYER: (adapted from *The Valley of Vision*)

O Lord, you are very great. My lot is to approach you with godly fear and humble confidence, for your condescension equals your grandeur, and your goodness is your glory. I am unworthy, but you welcome; guilty, but you are merciful; indigent, but your riches are unsearchable. Happy are those who are Christ’s: in him at peace with you, justified from all things, delivered from coming wrath, made heirs of future glory. Give me such deadness to the world, such love to the Savior, such attachment to his church, such devotedness to his service, as proves me a subject of his salvation. And grant me all that I need to live this way through Christ and by his Spirit, for your glory, Amen.

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SCRIPTURE READING: Revelation 21:1-8

When we read these words, “I am making all things new,” our hearts are filled with longing. But key to understanding how God is making all things new is that little word *new*. The word is not new as in “chronologically new,” but new in terms of quality. And in fact, we are already experiencing this new. The Apostle Paul tells us, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17). Because we are in Christ, we now experience the new creation realities, although the fullness of our experience awaits the resurrection. In that day, the entire creation will participate.

That world will be a *new place*—nothing else than a new heavens and a new earth. It means a *new people*—God’s people are depicted as a city, New Jerusalem, a holy city bringing heaven to earth. And we will know a *new presence*—God himself dwelling in the midst of his people, where we know the full reality of being his people and belonging to him as our God. We await that coming day when the newness that God promises will be fully realized. We know that day will come because we belong to him.

HYMN: “THE SANDS OF TIME ARE SINKING” Palmertree (also Trinity Hymnal 546)

The sands of time are sinking, the dawn of heaven breaks,
the summer morn I’ve sighed for, the fair, sweet morn awakes.
Dark, dark had been the midnight, but dayspring is at hand,
and glory, glory dwelleth in Emmanuel’s land.

O Christ, he is the fountain, the deep, sweet well of love.
The streams on earth I’ve tasted; more deep I’ll drink above.
There to an ocean fullness his mercy doth expand,
and glory, glory dwelleth in Emmanuel’s land.

The bride eyes not her garment, but her dear bridegroom’s face.
I will not gaze at glory, but on my King of Grace;
not at the crown he giveth, but on his pierced hand:
the Lamb is all the glory of Emmanuel’s land.

O I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine!
He brings a poor, vile sinner into his house of wine.
I stand upon his merit, I know no other stand,
not e’en where glory dwelleth in Emmanuel’s land.

PRAYER:

O triune God, Father, Son, Spirit, we long for that day when you make all things new. We know that this is your world and that your almighty and ever-present power continues to uphold all things. We are grateful for the beauty of this world, even as it is subject to decay, and for the rhythms of this world, even as they know interruption. Yet we long for newness in quality, for you to show what this world was meant to be in all of its glory. We long to be new people in a new place with a new, fuller experience of your presence. Hasten that day, Lord God! We ask it in Jesus’ name, Amen.

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