

February 22, 2021

Lectionary Passages:

Psalm 77

Job 4:1-21

Ephesians 2:1-10

Selected Verses:

I cried out to God for help;  
I cried out to God to hear me.  
When I was in distress, I sought the Lord;  
at night I stretched out untiring hands,  
and I would not be comforted. – Psalm 77: 1-2

Your words have supported those who stumbled;  
you have strengthened faltering knees.  
But now trouble comes to you, and you are discouraged;  
it strikes you, and you are dismayed.  
Should not your piety be your confidence  
and your blameless ways your hope? – Job 4: 4-6

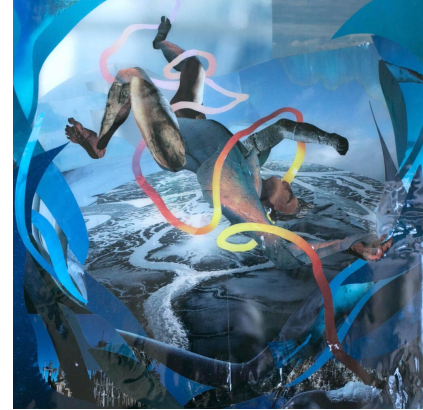
For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. – Ephesians 2: 8-10

Devotional:

When have you felt like God is not listening to you? You have spent time in prayer, and God has not answered. You have felt isolated, abandoned and alone. Like the picture above, based on Psalm 77, you have cried out to God again and again, and you feel like you are falling into the waters. There are times in life, maybe even right now, that the foundations of your life seem to be falling apart.

When times like that happen, it is often good to have friends around. In the book of Job, when his life completely collapsed (his children were killed, his sheep, oxen, and other animals destroyed or stolen, and he was infected with sores), his three friends came to visit. The best thing they did was remain silent. Often, at times of struggle, having friends that simply sit with us and listen is what is most needed. Yet, after a time, they offer their advice. In the midst of their words, there are sentences that make sense.

Eliphaz spoke of the advice job had given when things were going well. Job had supported those who struggled, Job had cared for others. Now that things are going bad for Job, why should Job be discouraged? For a moment, it sounds like Eliphaz is encouraging Job to not be discouraged. Job has encouraged others when things went bad, now is the time for others to encourage him. Yet, the words are not encouragement. Eliphaz had basically said, “if you have



been truly righteous, if Job were a pious man, he would not be suffering these catastrophes.” All too often, this seems the easy answer. You have brought this upon yourself. If you lived a better life, you wouldn’t be in this spot now. If you took care of yourself, you wouldn’t have the health issues you have today.

All too often, we either say this about (or to) others, or say it to ourselves. Eliphaz, along with his friends, came to Job and asked him to confess his sins and realize these events are the cost of his sins. Yet, it is while everything seems to be falling apart, and maybe we feel like we are falling into the ocean of despair, that we can find the hope that only comes through Jesus Christ.

In Ephesians 2, Paul tells us what has already happened. When we are alive in Christ and dead to our transgressions. By God’s grace, we have been given life and life eternal. With this in mind, Paul writes, “God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.” This has already happened. God has already raised us up and seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms. We may not be able to see it, yet we are already received grace and eternal salvation from God. We live in an already—not yet time. We are already seated in the presence, but not yet fully experience it.

When life collapses around us, we are already given new life in Jesus Christ by the grace of God. Unlike the words of Eliphaz, we should not use trite words. God invites us to cry out to him. Even when we do not feel the presence of God, God is present and given us a foundation of faith to live in and through the difficult times in life.

Prayer:

Almighty God, as we journey through Lent, we are ever thankful for your saving presence. We see the darkness around us. We know times when we are filled with despair and do not experience your presence. We cry out to you and it seems like you are not present. Even when we cannot sense it, come near and hold us in the embrace of your salvation. Remind us that you have claimed us and we are your handiwork, created to do your good works through Jesus Christ. May we live by faith, through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord. Amen.