

March 9, 2021

Lectionary Passages:

Psalm 84

2 Chronicles 29:1-11, 16-19

Hebrews 9:23-28



Selected Verses:

Even the sparrow finds a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may lay her young,  
at your altars, O Lord of hosts,  
my King and my God.  
Happy are those who live in your house,  
ever singing your praise. – Psalm 84: 3-4

Hezekiah began to reign when he was twenty-five years old... He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, just as his ancestor David had done. In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them.  
– 2 Chronicles 29: 1-3

Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.  
– Hebrews 9: 24

Devotional:

Spring is in the air around Hermiston. Yesterday, I had to drive to Baker City for a meeting. During the meeting, three inches of snow fell on the ground. This morning, I look over at the neighbor's yard and see the daffodils. Their bright yellow color tells us spring is here. Another sign of spring is the returning of the birds. Overhead, you can see and hear the sandhill cranes and Canada geese making their annual migration north. Though, I usually hear the sandhill cranes before I see them.

Another neighbor has starlings that nest inside his attic this time of year. Years ago, they had broken a vent cover and got in. Now, each year they return and build their nests. Though I have told the neighbors, the starlings enter and make their nest. I wonder about the mess and destruction this is causing. Yet it is out of sight and thus out of mind.

When we read the Psalms, that the sparrow and swallow find their home and make their nests at the altar, I do not think it is this image of destruction. What David, the Psalmist, had in thought was the protection of God. The image of the courts of God where all protected. In the midst of destruction and suffering, the birds found protection in the house of God. How much David pines, even faints to meet with the saints in the house of God.

Yet, within a few generations of David, the king of Israel along with the people had forgotten about the house of God. Instead of Israel being a place for people to find safety in the house of God, they found destruction and war. Those who remained faithful to God were persecuted and alone. They could not notice God's protection.

By the time of Hezekiah, the house of God had been abandoned. The beautiful Temple built by King Solomon was in disrepair. The birds had made their nests on the altar. The place was literally filled with “filth.” When King Hezekiah assumed the throne, he changed the direction of Israel from his father, Ahaz. We are told Ahaz “did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord.” Ahaz put up shrines to false gods throughout Jerusalem. He destroyed the holy items within the Temple and locked the doors. Ahaz was evil enough, that at his death he was not buried in the family cemetery.

Hezekiah brought change. He did “what was right in the sight of the Lord.” In the first month, Hezekiah opened the doors of the Temple and had it cleaned out. He restored the priests and worship within the Temple. Pagan shrines were destroyed, Passover was restored, Israel returned to following the Lord. It is noted that he was as righteous as King David. There was a great revival in Israel. Something the United States could use today.

Yet, it was a short-lived revival. Hezekiah reigned for 29 years. His son Manasseh was 12 years-old when he assumed the throne. He again “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.” This was the pattern for Israel. There would be one king who would restore the Temple and worship of the Lord. Then, there would be generations of kings who would do what was evil in the sight of the Lord. This also meant that the priests would turn from leading the people in following the Lord.

In Jesus Christ, God accomplished something different, something new. Even though kings and nations may switch between doing right and doing evil, Jesus is the High Priest who has entered the heavenly Temple. This is not a temple that can become cluttered and filled with pagan gods. It cannot fall into disrepair. In fact, Christ has entered the presence of God and appears on our behalf. As our priest, his life has been offered as the sacrifice that allows us to receive forgiveness for sins. Instead of sacrifices being done over and over in the humanmade Temple, Jesus’ sacrifice provided atonement for sin once and for all. Jesus bore your sins and mine on the cross, then went to the presence of God as our priest.

While we still need to worry about false teachers, we do not need to worry about our relationship with God. When we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we have a high priest that offered his life that we might have a right relationship with God.

#### Prayer:

Christ Jesus, you are the great high priest. You have gone before us and opened up a way for us to follow, and because you are our high priest, we are able to enter into the presence of the Father. Thank you for coming to earth and suffering far more than we experience so that you could intercede for us. We ask you, O high priest, to intercede for us now as we bring our requests before the throne of grace. (Spend a moment offering prayers for our community, people dealing with sickness, etc).

We are grateful that we have been reconciled to you, O God, through the death of Jesus Christ, your Son. We rejoice that he went to the cross for us, rose again, and is now before your throne in heaven above, pleading our cause and leading us to righteousness. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.