

**Luther Place Memorial Church
Lenten Devotionals**

Week Three – Susanne Blume

Monday, March 1

Psalm 105:1-15 [16-41] 42 -- Exodus 33:1-6 -- Romans 4:1-12

For God remembered God's holy promise....

Psalm 105:42

I have been spending some time with the Lutheran Study Bible, which came out last year, and have been especially looking at the comments about Martin Luther and the Bible. Scripture was important to Luther and one commentator even says that it was Luther's study of scripture that caused the Lutheran Reformation.

The Lutheran Study Bible describes scripture as the "first language of faith" and today's scripture texts focus on our ancestor Abraham and his faith. The psalmist reminds us of God's covenant with Abraham. The psalm repeats the history of God's people, from Abraham to Joseph, to enslavement and then deliverance out of Egypt. Over and over again God has made promises to God's people. Over and over again God delivers God's people from harm. Paul reminds us that Abraham was seen as righteous, in right relationship with God, not because of any deeds or works of his own, but because Abraham had faith.

Our scripture tests for this week show us God's promises and tell us stories of God's deliverance. I think that it is helpful to be reminded of these two truths about God during our time of Lent. The three stories that we read this week in the scripture texts all show the role faith played as God brings deliverance in times of peril. In our own journeys, what role does faith play for us in our time? How has faith helped return you to righteousness - right relationship, with God?

Prayer: God of promises and deliverance. Over and over again in the stories of your people we see you keep your promises and bring deliverance. In both the stories of scripture and in our stories today, we see you yearn for us. We sing our praise and thanks to you for all you have done for us. We seek your presence and your strength during this time of Lent. Help us to come to renewed faith and a renewal of a right relationship with you. Accompany us, O God, in our hopeful journey toward the one who delivered us all, your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Tuesday, March 2

Psalm 105:1-15 [16-41] 42 -- Numbers 14:10b-24 -- 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

God is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression.....

Numbers 14:18

Blue Like Jazz by Don Miller is the book we are studying during Lent. I was not familiar with his work but the book is like a meditation about coming to a life of faith. In the early days, says Miller, it seemed God was down a dirt road, walking toward him. In the beginning, God was a swinging speck in the distance. Now God is close enough that Miller can hear God singing. Someday, Miller hopes, he will be able to see the lines on God's face.

Miller also talks about story. He finds that the elements of story – setting, conflict, climax and resolution - parallel his understanding of Christian spirituality, coming to faith. I'm not sure what it is about story that draws us in but much of the Bible is told in the form of story. We come back to these tales time and again as we walk on the dirt road with God coming toward us.

In today's story from Numbers, to put it politely, God is peeved at the Israelites. After all God has done for them, they have the nerve to rebel. God is angry, or anguished, enough to threaten to destroy them. God suggests starting a new nation with Moses.

Moses answers God in two ways. First, Moses asks God to think about what other people will say if they see that he has destroyed the Israelites. Then Moses reminds God of God's promises about God's-self. God is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression. I believe that Moses is not telling God anything God doesn't already know. But Moses is, it seems to me, playing the role of a close friend, who helps us to remember things we already know. I think of the times in my own life when I have felt worthless and needed someone to remind me of good things I have done. In times of arrogance, I have also sometimes needed someone to remind me of my faults. It's sort of odd to have Moses playing the role of bringing God back to God's-self. Here, Moses plays the role of deliverance, to God. God also delivers the people from the threats God made out of his dismay at the Israelites. The promises God keeps, the deliverance God brings, can help call us back to our faith when we misstep on our journey.

Prayer: God of promises and deliverance. Over and over again in the stories of your people we see you keep your promises and bring deliverance. In both the stories of scripture and in our stories today, we see you yearn for us. We sing our praise and thanks to you for all you have done for us. We seek your presence and your strength during this time of Lent. Help us to come to renewed faith and a renewal of a right relationship with you. Accompany us, O God, in our hopeful journey toward the one who delivered us all, your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Wednesday, March 3

Psalm 105:1-15 [16-41] 42 -- 2 Chronicles 20:1-22 -- Luke 13:22-31

We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.

2 Chronicles 20:12

Our story from Second Chronicles is set in the era when the Israelites lived under kings. It takes place during the time of the reign of King Jehoshaphat. Conflict in the story comes when outside forces rise up to do battle against the king and his people. Earlier in the story we see that the king is someone who “walks with God.” When the King hears the news of the coming conflict he “set himself to seek the Lord.” The king proclaims a fast and assembles the people. The people pray. God’s spirit comes upon one of the people and God speaks through him. God promises deliverance. The story climaxes the next day, as the armies assemble for battle. Singers go before the Israelite soldiers, praising God and God’s love for the people. God sets an ambush and tricks the opposing forces so that they start fighting each other. The Israelites are saved and the story is resolved.

This may be a true story or it may not. In the Lutheran Study Bible, the commentator writing about the books First and Second Chronicles indicates that the books were written around the time that the Israelites were returning to Jerusalem after they had been exiled to Babylon. Israel had been defeated, the temple destroyed, the people taken prisoner. The remnants returning after a generation of exile may have been wondering if God had abandoned them. They may have wondered if they were still the people of God. For them, then, this story could have served as a reminder of the promises and deliverance that a life of faith in God offers.

What can this story mean for us? I am struck by the fact that yesterday’s story was about a people who had fallen out of faith to God. The people in this story are righteous – in right relationship with God. As people of faith, when they have a problem, they “seek the Lord.” They pray. They did not know what to do and they turned their eyes on God.

I confess there are many times when I feel like I am more like the people in the story from Numbers than the people in the story from Second Chronicles. Again and again I find myself not walking with God. This is one of the realities, I believe, of being a people who have been given free will. I think I know everything, I think I can do it myself, I am tired of waiting. But the two stories together remind me that I can move from being a Numbers person to being a Second Chronicles person. I can always return to being in right relationship with God. This is one of the promises God has made us. This is what God yearns for from us. This is why God gave us the gift of his son. This is my deliverance.

Prayer: God of promises and deliverance. Over and over again in the stories of your people we see you keep your promises and bring deliverance. In both the stories of scripture and in our stories today, we see you yearn for us. We sing our praise and thanks to you for all you have done for us. We seek your presence and your strength during this time of Lent. Help us to come to renewed faith and a renewal of a right relationship with you. Accompany us, O God, in our hopeful journey toward the one who delivered us all, your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thursday, March 4

Psalm 63:1-8 -- Daniel 3:19-30 -- Revelation 2:8-11

For there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way.

Daniel 3:29

Most of this story of deliverance because of faith is also part of the scripture text from Daniel at the Easter Vigil. Whenever I have participated in this service, I've begged to be allowed to read this story. It is almost like a rap song, with its repetitions and rhythms. The verse above is the end of the vigil reading. We hear that there is no other god like our God. And then - POW! - the lights come on and it is Easter.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are more Second Chronicles people than Numbers people. Their belief in the promises of God is so strong that they are willing to be thrown into a fiery furnace for defying King Nebuchadnezzar. And God delivers them.

It is clear to me, when I hear this story aloud, that it is a story that was told before it was a story that was read. Much of scripture is the same. People told the stories to each other. I sometimes try to just listen to the readings on Sundays instead of following along in the bulletin. It helps me to remember that people of faith first heard the Word. I also remember the experience of hearing a former pastor here chant the preface. Each Sunday, while he was chanting, it was as though I could feel each of the generations going back in time until I reached the generation that heard those words for the very first time.

Luther himself distinguished the Word of God from scripture. He felt the Word of God was essentially oral in character, a "living voice." He lamented that out of necessity scripture came to be.

Luther makes an important point but I am still grateful that the faith journeys of those who came before me have been preserved in written form. I can turn to them again and again in my own faith journey to see the promises and the deliverance that God has brought. I can turn to them again and again for guidance in how my ancestors tried to live out lives of faith. Again and again I can see Jesus make his ineluctable journey to Jerusalem, betrayal, trial, imprisonment and death. Again and again I can feel the POW! of Easter.

Prayer: God of promises and deliverance. Over and over again in the stories of your people we see you keep your promises and bring deliverance. In both the stories of scripture and in our stories today, we see you yearn for us. We sing our praise and thanks to you for all you have done for us. We seek your presence and your strength during this time of Lent. Help us to come to renewed faith and a renewal of a right relationship with you. Accompany us, O God, in our hopeful journey toward the one who delivered us all, your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Friday, March 5

Psalm 63:1-8 -- Daniel 12:1-4 -- Revelation 3:1-6

My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

Psalm 63:8

The scripture text from Psalm 63 for today is not really a story. It seems to me that it is more like what happens after the resolution of a story, I think that any one of the people in the stories of deliverance we have looked at this week could have spoken or written these words of praise.

The psalmist is telling us that God has been the one who helps. The psalmist's soul is satisfied the way one is after a good meal. At the same time, the psalmist's soul both thirsts for and clings to God. The psalmist still seeks God.

We can't even begin to speculate about the story that may be behind the emotions reflected in this psalm. Surely though, these are the words of someone who has walked in right relationship with God. Surely these are the words of someone who yearns for God as much as God yearns for us. I think that the psalmist may have been someone who had seen the fulfillment of God's promise and deliverance. The psalmist was also probably someone who rested in the confidence that in any situation in the future God's promises and deliverance were always available.

To use Don Miller's metaphor, the psalmist has gotten close enough to God to see the lines on God's face. The scripture texts we've been looking at this week all help us to be aware that trying to be faithful, coming back to faith, living a life of faith, will lead us toward that point in the road. As we move further along on our Lenten journey, a journey of faith, we also come close to seeing the lines on Jesus' face.

Prayer: God of promises and deliverance. Over and over again in the stories of your people we see you keep your promises and bring deliverance. In both the stories of scripture and in our stories today, we see you yearn for us. We sing our praise and thanks to you for all you have done for us. We seek your presence and your strength during this time of Lent. Help us to come to renewed faith and a renewal of a right relationship with you. Accompany us, O God, in our hopeful journey toward the one who delivered us all, your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Saturday, March 6

Psalm 63:1-8 -- Isaiah 5:1-7 -- Luke 6:43-45

It is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

Luke 6:45

In both the scripture text from Isaiah and Luke we return to the images of figs and vineyards that we saw in the Psalm earlier this week. At the time that these scripture texts were spoken or written, society in general was much more agrarian than most of us experience today. I am a person who gets her food not from the land but from the grocery store on P Street. I know that I have been in a vineyard. I like fig newtons but I am not sure that I have ever seen a fig. To the people who first heard or read these texts there may be many meanings that are lost on me. So how can we find meaning in our context?

I often walk to a small grove of trees up the street from my apartment. I think of it as my sacred grove. I have now lived in the neighborhood for a year so I have experienced the whole cycle of seasons under these trees. So on a day after the recent snows, after I slogged, climbed and slid my way to the grocery store and walked in to see tulips for sale, I felt hope. I remembered that under the mounds of snow in my sacred grove are the daffodils that will come out in the spring. That is my agrarian experience. It offers hope.

Hope is a good thing, I think, because I find both of these texts to be a little threatening. Am I an unfaithful vineyard? Am I a good tree or a bad tree? The answer to those questions will be found in the gospel text for tomorrow. Jesus talks about figs and vineyards and in the words of the gardener in the parable we will find hope.

Luther believed that God's word is realized in a community of faith only because the word itself acts on us. Our scripture texts for this week in lent have told us of God's promises, of God's deliverance, of the ability to come back to a life of faith each time we stray. Hope is given to us for our journey. May God's word act on us so that God's word may be realized in our community. May the promise and deliverance found in Jesus sustain you in your life of faith. May you feel the hope that his life offers.

Prayer: God of promises and deliverance. Over and over again in the stories of your people we see you keep your promises and bring deliverance. In both the stories of scripture and in our stories today, we see you yearn for us. We sing our praise and thanks to you for all you have done for us. We seek your presence and your strength during this time of Lent. Help us to come to renewed faith and a renewal of a right relationship with you. Accompany us, O God, in our hopeful journey toward the one who delivered us all, your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.