

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Ash Wednesday
March 5, 2025
Psalm 6

Save Me Because of Your Unfailing Love

O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath. 2 Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing; heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled. 3 My soul also is greatly troubled. But you, O LORD- how long? 4 Turn, O LORD, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love. 5 For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who will give you praise? 6 I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. 7 My eye wastes away because of grief; it grows weak because of all my foes. 8 Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping. 9 The LORD has heard my plea; the LORD accepts my prayer. 10 All my enemies shall be ashamed and greatly troubled; they shall turn back and be put to shame in a moment. (Psalm 6:1-10 ESV)

In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lent in many ways is a journey. We journey with our Lord to the cross and deal with the forgiveness of our sins. Each week we will hear a portion of the reading of the Passion story of our Lord, and we will reflect upon our Lord's death and what that means to sinners like you and me. That reflection is a familiar part of Lent.

It would be easy to make a journey like that no more than a trip down memory lane, a stroll through the story of Jesus' death. But Lent in the Church really has two focuses: First, it is a time to reflect on Christ's Passion and death for the sins of the world. Second, it is a time of learning and spiritual renewal through the Word of God. In the Early Church, Lent was the time when those preparing for Baptism received their final instructions in the faith before being baptized. So, this Lent we will certainly hear about Christ's Passion and death, and also about what that has to do with who we are as Christians who need the forgiveness won there.

A moment ago, we prayed Psalm 6. This psalm of David belongs to a group we call the penitential psalms. The word penitence or penitential is related to another very Lutheran word: repentance. What is repentance? Repentance is turning away from your sins and turning to Christ for forgiveness. Repentance, then, is ultimately a gift from God, because only God can turn the sinner's heart toward Him. It reminds us of Luther's words about Baptism in the Small Catechism:

What does such baptizing with water indicate?

It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

From this we learn that the process of contrition and repentance is daily, not a one time event. It is the cycle of the Christian life. Law and Gospel. Sin and forgiveness. That is why we continue to repent, confess, and receive absolution. That is why we go to the Lord's Supper week after week. It is about living the Christian life, not simply knowing right answers.

This is what God teaches us in the penitential psalms. In Psalm 6 David begins by lamenting that it seems that God has abandoned him. It is severe Law. David feels that God is angry with him, and so he prays that God will have mercy on him because he is weak and troubled.

Where does this start for you? What does this tell you about God? Well, first of all, it tells you that God hates sin. Yet, sin is never disconnected from the sinner. Thus, when you sin, it can be said that God hates you. Does that sound harsh? You bet! God's Law is very harsh. As the psalmist writes in Psalm 5, "You hate all evildoers" (5:5). The Law doesn't wink at sin, though you and I try to do so. Yes, our sin is bad, but let's just ignore it. This is like saying, "My cancer isn't that bad; it's just on the top of my skin." You dare not ignore sin. Sooner or later it will dig in and do its work of destruction.

As we go on to verse two of Psalm 6, David prays that the Lord will be gracious to him and heal him. Like blind Bartimaeus, or the Canaanite woman, David is not going to let God off the hook just like God won't let David off the hook. You see, David knows God's true character. He hates for a time but loves for eternity.

Now think again about the effect that this sin has on David. He is faint, his bones are in agony, his soul is in anguish. He even cries out, "No one remembers You when he is dead. Who praises You from the grave?" (cf. v. 5). David is afraid for his very life. Worn out from groaning, flooded with tears, eyes, weak with sorrow, fail because of all his foes.

David's picture in Psalm 6 of the effect of sin is profound and even painful. It's a picture that makes us all squirm. We don't like to talk about our sinfulness or think about it. We would much rather think of ourselves as basically nice people. We might think, "I'm a Christian, and that means all this sin talk is for someone else." But remember, David was also a Christian. David grew up in a household that looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. Sin isn't just something that unbelievers have to deal with and address. Sometimes in the Church we can get the mistaken idea that sin and forgiveness is only for the bad people, but that the Christians

just praise God because He's so great. Well, that's a false comparison. The angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner who repents. And that means you.

Still, there is hope. That is the central message of Psalm 6. No matter how messed up your life has become. No matter how far down the path of sin you have trod. No matter what nightmares trouble you and pain you have caused to yourself and to others. God is merciful and forgiving. He hates the sinner for breaking the Law, BUT because of Jesus Christ, God loves the sinner even more. He loved you so much that His Son, Jesus, went to the cross and died for you. God poured out all of His wrath over sin and sinners on Jesus on the cross. God's unfailing love will put you back together when nothing else can. Only God can scatter your enemies: sin, death, and the devil. Only the mercy of God in Jesus Christ can turn your life around and remake you in the waters of Baptism. Only God has given His Son in a Holy Meal to feed you and forgive you.

This Lent we are taking a journey together to the cross of Jesus Christ. On this journey we are going to learn about God's mercy for lost sinners like you and like me. We are going to hear about God's gift of forgiveness that He gives in confession and absolution. For most, it will be a new journey, or at least a new path on this same journey. Confessing your sins, not generically but specifically, is a hard thing. So hard, in fact, that many will never even try it. But I am here today to hold up God's gift of forgiveness to you, and everything He has to give in His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Lord has heard my cry for mercy; the Lord accepts my prayer (cf. Psalm 6:9). In the name of Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

(From God's Gift of Forgiveness from CPH)

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