

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Psalm 122

Psalm 122:

¹ *I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!"*

² *Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.*

³ *Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together.*

⁴ *To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord.*

⁵ *For there the thrones for judgment were set up, the thrones of the house of David.*

⁶ *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you.*

⁷ *Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers."*

⁸ *For the sake of my relatives and friends, I will say, "Peace be within you."*

⁹ *For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.*

A gentleman named David Slagle from Decatur, Georgia, wrote,

"I love ribs, so when I heard about a restaurant that had amazing ribs, a bunch of my friends and I drove fifty minutes to get there. The place was packed, and the food was great. It was 'all-you-can-eat rib night,' and the rib bones were piling up as fast as the line to get in.

"Eating ribs is messy business. Barbecue sauce gets on your face, fingers, and clothes. Dirty napkins pile up next to half-eaten bowls of baked beans and coleslaw. When our crew had eaten all we could, we paid our tab and waddled out to the car.

I reached into my pocket for my keys and came up with nothing but lint. Panicking, I looked through the window at the ignition. I hoped that I had locked my keys in the car because, in the back of my mind, a more disgusting possibility was taking shape. When I saw that the ignition was empty, I knew exactly where my keys were – keys to my car, my home and my office. Only seconds earlier, those precious keys had slid off my tray and followed a half-eaten corn cob and many bones to the bottom of a trash can. I had thrown away my keys on all-you-can-eat rib night.

"My friends weren't going to do the dirty work for me. So, I dove into the dumpster, fishing through bones, beans, barbecue, corn, cake, coleslaw, and a host of saliva-soaked napkins. A shiny layer of trash-can slime coated my arms before I finally grabbed those precious keys.

"As I meditate on the incarnation this Christmas season, I think about our dumpster-diving God. I mean no disrespect by calling God that. On the contrary, I have a soaring adoration for the infinite God who left a pristine, sinless heaven to search through the filth and rubbish of this fallen world for something precious to him—me."

Over the next four weeks, we will once again venture into the territory of the advent season and be reminded of who this dumpster-diving God is, why he sent his precious one and only Son into the rubbish—slime-covered, craziness of this world. Every Christmas, we hear about how Jesus came to save us. I want to invite you this season to not only hear this good news again, but to listen and know intimately again, or maybe for the very first time, that this baby named Jesus, not only came to save us, but also to bring us peace, hope, joy and love. On this

first Sunday of Advent, we are going to explore Psalm 122 and the message of peace that it offers us.

The opening of Psalm 122 implies that the psalmist was invited to go to the temple to worship God. He tells us that he rejoiced along with those who went with him to the temple, they were excited about going because for them it meant returning to that spot which represented the most intimate encounter between the divine and the human.

Going to worship can either be a chore or a delight for us. It sounds like the psalmist was genuinely glad to be there. This is significant to consider because we have to wonder if this is a genuine emotion of the heart and mind in many for whom worship has become something of an obligation. Some questions we might ask ourselves are: Have we lost the “glad” part of worship? How is “glad” communicated? Can we tell if a person is glad?

The fact that the psalmist indicates that he was not alone when he went to worship communicates that the “glad” part we experience is produced deep within our souls, not only because of our love for God, but because we anticipate eagerly our interaction and connections with others who will likewise be worshiping God with us.

Yes, we come to worship God, but we also come because we want to be with each other. That is unless the congregation is grumpy and gloomy. A grumpy, gloomy, and complaining congregation is a real turn-off. It doesn't make people glad, and if people are not glad, going to church is a practice that is not sustainable for the long term. And if people are not going to church, they're missing out on a blessing, the blessing of knowing God, a blessing that produces gladness of heart and spirit. The words in this psalm communicate that the blessing of gladness of heart and spirit fosters peace.

In verses six through nine the psalmist speaks of peace. The peace sought in these verses is much more than the mere absence of conflict. It suggests completeness, health, justice, prosperity and protection.

In verse six the psalmist writes, “May they prosper who love you.” The you in this sentence is Jerusalem. He hopes that there will be many people who will love the city of God, and he wishes for prosperity for those who do. His thinking is a sign of the high regard he has for Jerusalem because it is central to the plan that God has for his people.

If we consider this on a personal level, it's a moving thought—that the “you”, whoever it may be, is valued and considered dear. It expresses a desire that all people will have a network of those who love and care for them, and that these people, in so doing will prosper.

There's no way of being sure what type of prosperity the psalmist had in mind. Certainly though, when we are among those who love others, a certain kind of inner prosperity, inner health and inner well-being is sure to follow. And the love we offer will surely bless and uplift the “you” of our affections and support.

In verse seven the psalmist said, “Peace be within your walls.” Here he expresses a desire for the well-being of a community. The walls he refers to are the walls of the city. The hope is that peace may come to the neighborhoods and communities who lived within those walls.

Today we live and work in more than one community. We live in a community that is defined by where our home is located along with the streets and homes around us. We also have the community in our workplace. And we also have our spiritual community which we find here at church.

The psalmist implies here that peace is not always within the walls of these communities. Our neighbors are too often divided by economic and ethnic conflict. Our workplace relationships are too often a source of tension rather than blessing. And, it is sad to say that even

in the church community, disagreement and griping are more common than love and goodwill. All of us should be devoting significant time and energy into promoting peace, through our words and actions, within the walls of the neighborhoods, workplaces and churches.

In verse eight, the psalmist narrows the space he spoke of from within the walls to “security within your citadels or towers.” This is a reference to the fortifications on the walls of Jerusalem. The hope is that these towers will provide protection for weary travelers as well as for citizens within the walls. The towers are symbols of security and safety. So, the psalmist is expressing the hope that Jerusalem and its travelers and inhabitants will be safe.

It is important that peace is first negotiated between opposing parties. Without peace there can be no safety. Perhaps this is why we value peace. When we have peace, we feel safe. Whether it is peace in our neighborhoods or peace at work or peace in our church, we feel safer, more secure and happier than when peace is absent.

In verse eight then, the progression of peace moves from the community to the towers, and now to the heart. The assumption here is that too often peace is not within us. Something else is within us. Instead of peace, there might be anger, bitterness, ingratitude, pettiness, a grudge, or dissatisfaction. Unfortunately, we sometimes put on a façade to hide the fact that any of these things may be within us. Unfortunately, putting on appearances is a form of deception not only harmful to our relationships with others, but first and foremost, to our own spiritual inner well-being. Do you have peace within?

Psalm 122 expresses the hope that peace might be within our “walls,” that security might be within our towers, and that peace might be within us. God wants us to have peace, so much so that God sent us the Prince of Peace.

But there’s another truth: the church, the worshiping body of believers, excited to worship God, and excited to be together, living in peace together, exists in part so that the people of the church can bless each other and bring the word of peace. Amen.