

"The Path of Righteousness"

08-04-2019 ~ Pentecost 8C ~ Sacred Earth, Sacred Work

Rev. Beckie Sweet

Psalm 85 (NRSV, *adapted*)

Prayer for the Restoration of God's Favor

O God, you showed favor to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

You forgave the iniquity of your people; you pardoned all their sin.

You withdrew all your wrath; you turned from your hot anger.

Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us.

Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations?

Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?

Show us your steadfast love, O God, and grant us your salvation.

Let me hear what God the Most High will speak, for God will speak peace to the people,
to those who are faithful, to those who turn to God in their hearts.

Surely salvation is at hand for those who revere God, that glory may dwell in our land.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,

and righteousness will look down from the sky.

God will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.

Righteousness will go before God, and make for God's footsteps a way.

From The Psalter, Liturgy Training Publication

For the choirmaster. A psalm of the sons of Korah.

Lord, you loved your land, brought Jacob back,

Forgot our guilt, forgave our sins,

Swallowed your anger, your blazing anger.

Bring us back, saving God. End your wrath.

Will it stop, or drag on forever?

Turn, revive us, nourish our joy.

Show us mercy, save us, Lord.

I listen to God speaking: "I, the Lord, speak peace,
peace to my faithful people who turn their hearts to me."

Salvation is coming near, glory is filling our land.

Love and fidelity embrace, peace and justice kiss.

Fidelity sprouts from the earth, justice leans down from heaven.

The Lord pours out riches, our land springs to life.

Justice clears God's path, justice points the way.

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Last Sunday...last Sunday. You all had worshiped God here, under the capable leadership of Deacon Bonnie. Last Sunday morning, I gathered my volunteer and paid staff for a week of camp at Sky Lake. After breakfast, some of us renewed our Safe Sanctuary training, first aid, CPR, and AED training. I lead an orientation for the week ahead as the temperatures and humidity continued to rise on the day. Then we worshiped together, shared lunch, and helped one another move into our cabins for the week, as we continued to prepare for the arrival of our Elementary aged campers.

By mid-afternoon, when the temperatures reached the 90's and the humidity was above 90%, campers that were eager, and not-so-eager, began to arrive with their families and caregivers. Just as soon as everyone was checked-in, we had a fire drill, and headed to the dining hall. Yes, that was when the thunder began to roll. This was not your average passing thunderstorm. Now, when you are at the top of Tuscarora Mountain, it just seems like the lightening and thunder are much closer than usual! The rain was torrential, and with the thunder and lightening, continued for six long hours. Mind you, half of these campers were away from home for the very first time, and the first night we have thunder, lightening, rain, and wet trails.

Because of my “mothering” style of leadership at Elementary Camp, and out of concern for those campers who might be frightened and homesick, one of my customary practices is to make the rounds from cabin to cabin before lights-out time to say goodnight, offer a bedtime prayer, and assess any areas of concern. Like the psalmist who was remembering the days of God's deliverance, I began remembering the days in my late teens and early 20's when I traversed these very same wet trails with ease. But Sunday evening as I stumbled from one cabin to another, I realized that it took much more effort to leap over the exposed tree roots, which by the way, I could not clearly see through my trifocals adjusted for reading close up. But through the pouring rain I trudged, and then my flashlight shorted out and the darkness swallowed me and my fortitude.

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And while I could remember the days of traveling those trails with ease, I knew I was in a tough spot, and began to pray for God to guide my feet on the path to accomplish the necessary ministry of compassion and care. I made it to the campers’ cabins, and then to my own without major incident (which means I stayed upright), and all of the campers and their counselors made it through the first night, as well.

In our desire to live into the promises of God that the faithful will know God’s salvation, we pray day by day that God will lead us in the path of righteousness. And as the Psalmist states:

***Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky.
God will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.***

Finding, and traversing the Path of Righteousness is imperative for our relationship with God, and for our stewardship of creation! Seeking the wholeness and strength to maintain the journey on that path, requires receiving the forgiveness and grace afforded to us through faith in Christ, through the practice of the sacraments, and through inviting others on the journey with us. Memories of journeys and blessings past help, but we still may encounter challenges which cause us to cry out to God.

Getting back to our week at Camp, yes, we had thunderstorms Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and even on Wednesday morning. We used all but one of my “rainy days options” for programming!! And even when the rain stopped, the trails, and everything in our cabins, were still WET! And yet, we found joy in the journey together, in our singing, and crafting, in our discovering and learning. When the end of the week came, and we realized we would soon be heading elsewhere, some campers were eager to get home to see moms, dads, pets, grandparents. But a couple of our campers did not have a home to go to. One of our U.M. Churches had adopted these

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brothers in a local shelter, paid their way to come to camp, and the boys needed to return to the shelter. They were relieved that the shelter staff did not arrive for pick-up until after ALL of the other campers had departed. And while we waited for their ride, one asked me, “If God loves me so much, why am I living in a shelter with my brother and sister?” My heart . broke. I cannot FIX their situation, but I can pray that

love and faithfulness will meet;

righteousness and peace will kiss each other in their young lives.

During our last Bible Study session, I asked the campers to sign this t-shirt, which had been lovingly tie-dyed for me by our Resource Person. I told the campers that this would be my Prayer Shirt, and that I would pray for them every day as we get ready for next year’s camp. Leading this camp and offering follow-up prayerful care is my personal mission. And, I would like to invite you, also, to pray for these precious young souls, especially for those who do not have a home and family, those with chronic health issues, those struggling with identity, with bullying, and with the challenges that life presents. Our circle of Christian care continues to expand ~ The Path of Righteousness!

Rev. Lisa Ann Moss has penned the lyrics to a hymn which I found inspiring this week. The first three verses read:

**God who brings the cleansing rain,
Saturate our thirsty bones
With the milk of mercy sweet,
With the blood that brings us home.**

**God who rules the fiery sun,
Kindle now our brittle hearts,
Set ablaze our tender lives,
Forge our ways till sin departs.**

**God who rides the winds of change,
Anchor us against its wrath,
Set our face toward holy ends,
Fix our walk upon **your** path.**