

Devotions – September 13-19, 2020
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On Tuesday April 7th of Holy Week in 2020, Psalm 7 came into my email queue on the daily ELCA server list. As I read Psalm 7, some loose thoughts on the verses flowed onto the page. Coronavirus was proving more than an infectious airborne respiratory illness; coronavirus had saturated all of our attention. I, for one, found it hard to focus on anything else. Following are 14 verses to reflect on, and I've divided them into seven reflections for the week. The words of the Psalm appear in **bold** in the column on the left, while my thoughts appear in *italics* on the right. The reflections are a blend of the psalmist together with the personal.

Sunday, September 13, 2020

Text: Psalm 7:1-2

"1O LORD my God, in you I take refuge; save me from all my pursuers, and deliver me, 2or like a lion they will tear me apart; they will drag me away, with no one to rescue."	<i>Else I am lost in space; From my isolating fears, Or steal my breath away; And no one to be left behind.</i>
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Idle time makes me feel alone and afraid. My mind wanders to unknowable questions, and I am lost once more in my own head space. That stalking lion of idleness can claw me apart or metaphorically shut me down. A virus so small as to be invisible can steal my breath away and devour life itself. Fear instills the idea of a virus dragging its victim away without hope of rescue. It's a lonely and sad time on planet Earth. But, in my heart, I have always known that God is my refuge, from things that are known and things that are unknown, really the only salvation any of us have ever had.

Let us Pray: *O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home. Be thou our guide while troubles last and our eternal home.*
(Text: Isaac Watts, 1674-1748)



Monday, September 14, 2020

Text: Psalm 7:3-4

**“³O LORD my God, if I have done this,
if there is wrong in my hands,
⁴if I have repaid my ally with harm
or plundered my foe without cause,”**

*Caused my own destruction,
Or in my steely heart,
Even pushed her away
Or without knowing,*

We were all living broken lives when the pandemic arrived. For my brother, a lifetime of mental illness has clouded his thinking, and he continues to make poor decisions. He won't budge an inch on his deplorable hygiene. Cigarette burned shirts, urine stained pants, a nauseating body odor of wet tobacco and rancid sweat. More than a personal decision, for him, hygiene is affecting how people perceive him. They see danger. Malintent. Evil. He qualifies for hands-on help from the VA but, if it involves a literal cleaning up of his appearance, he won't take it. I am afraid he is causing his own destruction. Though he has never harmed a soul, his slovenly appearance convicts him, lock stock and barrel.

It is hard for me as a Christian to see myself acting as that judge and jury. Yet, I know that I have done this thousands of times in thought, word, and deed without understanding the bigger picture, the view from the other side. I recently “repaid my ally with harm” when I barked at a good friend to keep her distance from me, meaning that six feet of social distancing. She looked stunned, like I had slapped her across the face.

Let us Pray: O God, you know that we have wrong in our hands, that we have repaid friends with harm, and stolen dignity from both friends and enemies for no good cause. Guide us to use our minds to serve our hearts. Help us to see Christ in all people.



Tuesday, September 15, 2020

Text: Psalm 7:5-6

**⁵then let the enemy pursue and overtake me,
trample my life to the ground,
and lay my soul in the dust.
⁶Rise up, O LORD, in your anger;
lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies;
awake, O my God;
you have appointed a judgment.**

*Let me breathe in bad air,
Or drown me in the river,
On the banks of the Brule.
We hear you once again;
Only you are able to stop this;
Open our eyes, Resurrection;
Upon us as a mighty storm.*

In late 2019, someone in Wuhan, China became infected with a virus from an animal while at a crowded outdoor marketplace. Alternatively, we don't know the origins, but the result is pandemic: Coronavirus is the enemy of our time. God did not send it upon Wuhan. Molecular

biology teaches that genes can mutate, and genes can be manipulated. This one crossed species and thrived in human lung, spreading easily in the air between us. In the crowded marketplace of life, do we not also bargain with God? Spare me and my loved ones! The Psalmist here is bargaining with God: If I have done these evil things, then take my life!

Sheltering in place in April, I decided to face my ever-growing fears. I went with a small group of hearty souls down the Brule river. What had started as negotiable waters soon turned into a cascading waterway as snow melt poured in from the river banks. When my kayak thrust into some tag alders, I abruptly dumped into the frigid waters of the Brule. The cold stole my breath away, and the swiftly moving current made it impossible to plant my feet firmly on the river bottom to regain any sense of footing. As I clawed my way up the tag alders, a thought flashed: Save me, O God! If I have done foolish things then let me bear the consequences: let the enemy pursue and overtake me, *Let me breathe in bad air*, trample my life to the ground, *Or drown me in the river*, and lay my soul in the dust, *On the banks of the Brule*. Wedged in among the gnarly thicket, it was my time to bargain in the watery marketplace.

Let us Pray: *Lord Jesus, thank you for the love you provide us, for the gift of life created inside each one of us. Thank you for rescuing us from our foolish and reckless decisions and from fear itself. With each breath we take, we offer our prayers to you. Selah.*



Wednesday, September 16, 2020

Text: **Psalm 7:7-8**

⁷Let the assembly of the peoples be gathered around you,	<i>A world wide web,</i>
and over it take your seat on high.	<i>Control our vanity.</i>
⁸The LORD judges the peoples;	<i>With unimagined Love;</i>
judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness	<i>Which should be You!</i>
and according to the integrity that is in me.	<i>But oft is hidden away.</i>

Time has seemingly stopped in our world, as if the Earth rests under a glass bubble. A writer named Julio Vincent Gambuto wrote, "...the treadmill you've been on for decades just stopped." He calls it: The Great Pause. "It's the greatest gift ever unwrapped. Not the deaths, not the virus, but The Great Pause. It is, in a word, profound. What the crisis has given us is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to see ourselves and our country in the plainest of views. At no other time, ever in our lives, have we gotten the opportunity to see what would happen if the world simply stopped."

What have you noticed in The Great Pause? I have read that the Himalayans, those majestic mountains of Nepal, can actually be seen from Punjab province India where, for many years, air pollution has obscured the view. I have read that Los Angeles without traffic is beautifully smog-

free. I have read that whales in the oceans can communicate once again without the stress and interference of commercial cargo containers and recreational cruise ships obstructing their sonar. I sense that we are saving more than human lives through social distancing and stay-at-home orders. I sense the Earth sighing and healing. Did we even care as a species before?

We are navigating an oxymoronic state of connectedness and isolation, *both at the same time*. Contact through internet but not by human touch. Has social deprivation propelled you to seek the presence of God in new ways? Is loving the Earth optional anymore?

Let us Pray: *O Lord, we did not ask for this special time, together yet apart, but we so need it. Grant that we may use our time wisely to grow stronger in faith and love. Grant that we may so love the Earth and all that is in it so as to support healing and revitalization of all that you have made.*



Thursday, September 17, 2020

Text: **Psalm 7:9-10**

⁹O let the evil of the wicked come to an end,	<i>It is time for the world to turn,</i>
but establish the righteous,	<i>Toward the divine heart within,</i>
you who test the minds and hearts,	<i>Let the fire of your judgement burn,</i>
O righteous God.	<i>The One who knows best.</i>
¹⁰God is my shield,	<i>God is my face mask,</i>
who saves the upright in heart.	<i>Faith lends the courage to cling.</i>

During the Great Pause, we have a collective opportunity to examine what needs to change in our broken self-absorbed world. A writer named Kathleen Dowling Singh so beautifully stated, "Something of defeat, something of tragedy, can be a sacrament because it stops us and causes us to look deeper." In what direction is God pointing you to look deeper? Could the world be about to turn? Are you wearing God as your face mask now?

“O Lord, our souls cry out with a joyful shout that the God of our heart is great; And our spirit sings of the wondrous things that you bring to the ones who wait. You fixed your sight on your servant's plight, and our weakness you did not spurn. So, from east to west shall your name be blest. And the world is about to turn.”

Though I am small, my God, my all, you work great things in me, And your mercy will last from the depths of the past to the end of the age to be. Your very name puts the proud to shame, and to those who would for you yearn, You will show your might, put the strong to flight, for the world is about to turn.

Though the nations rage from age to age, we remember who holds us fast: God's mercy must deliver us from the conqueror's crushing grasp. This saving word that our forebears heard is the promise which holds us bound; 'Til the spear and rod can be crushed by God, who is turning the world around.

My heart shall sing of the day you bring. Let the fires of your justice burn! Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near, and the world is about to turn!" [from *The Canticle of the Turning*]

Let us Pray: *O Lord, our hearts long for a more equitable and just world, where all peoples are treated compassionately, with dignity and respect. We pray for amazing grace. Where we have fear, sow love. Where we have doubt, sow faith. Where we despair, sow hope.*



Friday, September 18, 2020

Text: **Psalm 7:11-12**

**¹¹God is a righteous judge,
and a God who has indignation every day.
¹²If one does not repent,
God will whet his sword;
he has bent and strung his bow;**

*I so trust your Love for us,
Your patient call for us to change.
Or surrender past ways,
A virus is a powerful weapon;
An arrow of genetic turmoil;*

God talks to us through scripture and the Spirit, stirring our hearts to let go of beliefs that no longer serve Him, or us, for that matter. What we need to learn is the art of surrender. Theologian Richard Rohr, a Franciscan Catholic, said, "We live in a strobe light culture where we don't give ourselves time to surrender." Because "surrender" connotes weakness. But surrender isn't all about "losing"; it's also about "finding." Think about that, friends.

If we are to trust the love of God, if we are to believe that Jesus came to earth revealing the true nature of God, we need to let go, to surrender some of our entrenched, yet false, ideas about the nature of God. Lose ourselves, so as to find ourselves in something new. As a child, for example, I thought God demanded perfection, and I could never get my prayers exactly right. I know now that this idea is flawed: it doesn't align with the nature of what it means to be a loving Creator. Perfection, demanded of me by a righteous and angry God, no longer made sense! Do you know how freeing that is? I no longer have to demand perfection of myself now either.

Jesus came to reveal God with a fierce love that has no need to punish. Coronavirus wasn't sent by God to punish; yet, God can use all things for good. What ideas about the nature of God might you be holding onto that Jesus would have you surrender?

Let us Pray: *Oh God, we know from the Gospel the depth of your love for all creation in the gift of the crucified Jesus and the resurrected Christ. In times of turmoil and an unknown future, direct us to prayer, action, and contemplation, trusting in your unfailing love and mercy for humanity.*



Saturday, September 19, 2020

Text: **Psalm 7:13-14**

**¹³he has prepared his deadly weapons,
making his arrows fiery shafts.**

**¹⁴See how they conceive evil,
and are pregnant with mischief,
and bring forth lies.**

*Death is a fierce motivator,
Which will awaken our hearts.
The duplicitous politicians,
The media is the message,
Truth lies only in You.*

God uses all things for good. Including each one of us! At some point, we only need to wake up to that still, quiet voice of God that patiently waits for us to let Him in. Jesus said, “I stand at the door and knock.” Our life’s journey should be one wherein we seek to grow in faith, hope and love. And that requires a willingness to allow change in ourselves. Any spiritual director will tell you that.

A writer named David Foster Wallace once described personal freedom, for Americans, as “The freedom all to be lords of our tiny skull-sized kingdoms, alone at the center of all creation.” Like it or not, we each think we’ve got it right in figuring out the world around us. But we don’t have it right, nor do we ever see the totality of the truth that God sees and understands.

The problem is, for us, we don’t want to easily let go of our own skull-sized kingdoms. Even us Christians. Maybe especially us Christians. If the call to return to our normal lives means settling back into our own ingrained agendas – political, social, economic, you-name-it - what good will Coronavirus and this Great Pause really have accomplished?

We have the challenge now to turn toward God, allowing God to grow the kingdom of God on earth. I am hopeful that one day, humanity will look back and recognize the year 2020, not as a colossal inconvenience, but as a global time of human growth in faith, love, and hope.

Let us Pray: *Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again! Thanks be to God for opportunities to live the Gospel message more fully each and every day. Oh Lord, open our hearts to allow your Presence to awaken within us, and change us for good, on our grieving planet.*

