

Psalm 124

124:1 If it had not been the LORD who was on our side -- let Israel now say --

124:2 If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when our enemies attacked us,

124:3 then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us;

124:4 then the flood would have swept us away; the torrent would have gone over us;

124:5 then over us would have gone the raging waters.

124:6 Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey to their teeth.

124:7 We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the hunters; the snare is broken, and we have escaped.

124:8 Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

Romans 12:1-8

12:1I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship.

12:2Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect.

12:3For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

12:4For as in one body we have many members and not all the members have the same function,

12:5so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

12:6We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith;

12:7ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching;

12:8the encourager, in encouragement; the giver, in sincerity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Matthew 16:13-20

16:13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

16:14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist but others Elijah and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

16:15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

16:16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

16:17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven.

16:18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

16:19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

16:20 Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

The Noble Duke of York

My favorite hiking song. I sang it with Hadley at Shrine Mont.

Our Psalm for today is a Psalm of Ascent... Psalm 120 (after 119)-134

It too is a hiking song...

Halfway up... Ordinary Time...

We are all on a journey, but it is a journey that has already begun, and it is a journey in which we have not yet arrived...

It is at this juncture in the journey that the Psalm invites us to reflect on how far we have come, better yet, how far the Lord has brought us.

If it had not been for the Lord, Our enemies would have swallowed us up. Our creditors, etc.

If it had not been for the Lord, the flood waters would have washed us away. Grief

If it had not been for the Lord, we never would have gotten out of that tight spot. Depression

Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

And this claim is not just one claim among many, about who God is, or what God does.

It is a central, and foundational claim of our faith.

When Jesus is with his disciples at Cesarea Philippi, he asks them: Who do you say that I am?

And we, like the disciples, might be inclined to offer a variety of answers.

In their own time and place, they are inclined to give answers like Elijah, Jeremiah, or John the Baptist.

In our own time and place, we might be inclined to say things like, He was a prophet, a teacher, a healer, or someone who taught us how to live, or even someone who gives us hope.

But Peter responds with a singular answer: You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

When Peter says this, he is not just acknowledging Jesus as the fulfillment of a prophecy, or even putting Jesus in the category of being a divine person.

Instead, Peter is acknowledging that Jesus is the Lord, maker of heaven and earth. That he is the one who has saved us from our enemies, who has plucked us out of the raging flood, who has set us free from the snare. He is the anointed one of God, who redeems us as the bride he never had to take, and brings us into a family, from which we were estranged, that He is our help and refuge.

In this story, Peter is half way up the hill. For Peter, this is certainly a high point. On more than one occasion, Peter seems like the fool, the foil, the court jester, the village idiot. But here, he says the right thing, at the right time, for the right reasons. But we also know that Peter has a long way to go before he arrives.

Even Jesus is halfway up the hill.

In one breath, Jesus is praising Peter's affirmation of faith, promising him the keys to the kingdom. And then in the next breath "He sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ."

Jesus was on a journey, a journey that had already started, and it is a journey in which he has not yet arrived...

I think that is part of why our reading from Romans today often draws my attention. On the one hand, this is a high call to be living sacrifices to God, in which we are not conformed to this age, and the spirit of our times, and the whims of culture, and we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that we can discern what God wants. And what does God want? God wants what is good. God wants what is acceptable. God wants what is perfect.

Well, I can tell you right now, I'm out and disqualified at perfect, and frankly probably a lot earlier in that list... But I also think that is the point. We are none of us perfect. We are only here on the basis of God's mercy. We are only here by the grace of God.

Because if the Lord had not been for us... Well, we all know what would have happened... Plus, we are only half way up. We do not need to make any more of ourselves than that. We do not need to pretend to be any more polished, put together, healthy, capable, mentally stable, spiritually mature, (or anything else for that matter) than we are.

We all have a place. And we all have something to give, because we have all been given something. Here Paul talks about prophecy, and ministering, and teaching, and encouraging, in giving, in leading, in having compassion. But the fact is that you do not need to do or be all of those things...

You are who you are. You are who God made you. The gifts you have, you have been given.

And in thanksgiving we are called to live lives of gratitude.

Not out of pride.

But according to your gift...

Live YOUR LIFE as a living sacrifice, because you cannot live anyone else's, not even the other versions of your life you might have lived.

And whenever you are tempted to think that you should be this far along, or that far along, or even that you should be ahead or behind this person or the other; just remember that you have been on this journey every day of your life, that journey brought you here; and you have not arrived, but do not worry about it. You are halfway up the hill.