

Psalms of the Passion

A Lenten Midweek Sermon Series

This Lenten series allows us to consider the way the Psalms direct us to meditate on the passion of Christ. Each chosen Psalm enables the preacher to enter into three worlds with the text: 1) the world of the Psalm, 2) the world of Christ's life and passion, where it is appropriated in some fashion, and 3) the world of the believer, where it is re-appropriated in some fashion.

The preachers preaching on Psalm 31 and Psalm 34 may both look to move into Lenten calls for faith. The language is different enough, and the context of the Psalms and passion location is different enough that I think there will be little overlap.

The preachers preaching on Psalms 35, 69, and 109 will have to be careful. They are all dealing with the antagonism of the Messiah. Some guidance is provided about what direction a sermon might take. If a preacher decides to go another way, he should let the other preachers know his plan, so they take different paths.

This series was developed for a preaching rotation in the Mankato North Circuit by Pastor Jonathan Bourman who serves St. Mark Lutheran Church in Mankato, MN.

The series may be extended to include Holy Week:

Psalm 51: Ash Wednesday

Psalm 24: Palm Sunday

Psalm 88: Maundy Thursday

Psalm 22: Good Friday

Psalm 30: Easter Sunday

Psalm 31

"Into your hands, I commit my spirit." (Psalm 31:5) Jesus quotes part of this Psalm from the cross in Luke 23:36. Christ takes the words of Psalm 31 and uses them to express his faith in his last moments before death. Vivaldi, he adds the word "Father." In Acts 7, Stephen follows Christ in his martyrdom with this triumphant death cry, but this time, notably, the faith in the Psalm toward Jesus.

The call in Lent may be to die well. It also may be to live well, committing our lives to our Father through Christ in faith. Verses 1-8 may serve as a pericope, leading people by faith to stand in their spacious place.

Psalm 34

The Apostle John sees in Christ's unbroken legs the fulfillment of Psalm 34:20. This Psalm is interesting because it brings us into the moment of the crucifixion, telling us what did not happen to Christ's body. On the one hand, we know from Numbers and Exodus that this is a theological statement about the ritual purity of the sacrifice. On the other hand, in Lent, this may be a call to "taste and see" - we might note the experiential nature of this invitation - that the Lord is good. Our bones will not be broken. The stability of our lives will not be undone forever and fatally because of our faithful Christ. A possible pericope may be 34:8-22.

Psalm 35

Dr. John Burg comments that Psalm 35 parallels Psalm 22 as a description of the suffering of Jesus. Jesus seems to agree. He quotes Psalm 35:19 in John 15:25, taking the principle of the Psalm and applying it to himself. He is suffering unjustified hatred. The world hates him. It hates us too.

In Lent, this Psalm calls us to suffer with faith, the same when unjust sufferings happen to us. A possible pericope is Psalm 35:19-28. Another angle would be to use the text to teach how the cross of Jesus is retribution for our sins. In that case, we identify with the attacker(s) of Christ.

Psalm 69

(They hated me without reason is in this text. It should probably not be the sermon's main point so that it doesn't steal too much from Psalm 35, which has the exact quote.) The Psalm reads similarly to Psalm 22 as a prayer of the Messiah. There is a lot of material here that is picked up in the NT. Verses 20-21 call to me. They detail the broken heart of the Messiah and the gall and the vinegar. Here we get such a clear glimpse of the suffering of the Savior. (I struggle to suggest a pericope. I think it depends on what part of the Psalm the preacher wants to move into.)

The Lenten preacher might consider how Jesus' sufferings comfort us and call us away from sin.

Psalm 109

Psalm 109 features several connections to the life of Christ. Its speaker is a man of prayer and prays for his enemies (Luke 23:34). The betrayer will have a short life and be replaced. We see this in Acts 1. The wrong done to the pray-er leads to the heart of the Psalm, which is a lengthy and challenging curse prayer. Verse 31 brings us the needed resolution. We can entrust where the curse will fall to the Lord.

In Lent, this may function as a call not to betray the only innocent One in our lives but to turn to him. We do not want to be Judas. Christ is the only one who can bless. (I struggled to choose a pericope. I leave that to the preacher.)