

# **Preaching Copy: Deliverance from the Snares of Death-Psalm 116:3-8**

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Easter

Sunday, April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020

## **Text: Psalm 116:3-8**

<sup>3</sup> The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. <sup>4</sup> Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!" <sup>5</sup> Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful. <sup>6</sup> The LORD preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me. <sup>7</sup> Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you. <sup>8</sup> For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling;

## **Exegetical Statement**

The psalmist gives his reason for loving the LORD sacrificially and unconditionally. When he was surrounded by evil: being tormented and feeling distress as it he had been consigned to the eternal place of suffering, the LORD heard and answered His call for mercy. The LORD delivered his bodily life and eternal soul. The psalmist received this great gift of salvation not by his own works but by the generosity, compassion, and grace that the LORD has for all men, even those simple-minded naïve fools who unheedingly bring trouble upon their own heads. He can call upon the LORD and trust that the LORD will act by the power and working of faith which the LORD has given him. He then rhetorically asks what gift or repayment he could give to the LORD for all that the LORD has done for him. The unspoken answer is that He has nothing in his hands that is worthy of such great gifts. Instead he will express his love and faith in worshipful prayer and praise. He will make use of the gifts that the LORD provides in worship to renew and strengthen his faith so that he might give public witness of the LORD's grace and mercy before all the people in the temple.

## **Focus Statement:**

God has graciously provided Jesus who is Lord and ruler over the universe, while also being the source of our physical and spiritual-eternal redemption. We look to Him to provide the gracious and merciful salvation through the redemption He provided on the cross and the salvation promise that is His resurrection. In His gift of baptism we are born again to a new life in which we no longer grieve and pine for the old normal but willing live through the new normal as He empowers us to be the Church

## **Function Statement:**

### **Why it's important to know:**

As we look for a return to the old normal, and grieve its loss in the face of what will be the new normal as the result of the Pandemic, we look to those the LORD has put in place to provide secular leadership, who may not share our faith. We turn to men and fail to turn to the LORD in this our moment of trial and need

### **What the hearer should do as a result:**

While how we worship and how soon we gather will involve wisdom from the secular world, we have God's promise and command that we continue to do the work of the Church in this new normal: gathering together to build one another up so that we might proclaim as one body and through our vocations His Gospel Message to hearts in distress that need to hear it.

## **Subject Sentence: The LORD graciously saves us from all harm**

## **Introduction: Looking forward to Future after COVID-19**

In the past few days the Governor's has issued a new Executive Order extending Shelter in Place through May 15<sup>th</sup>. Along with this, over the past several weeks, officials from the State and Federal Government have been discussing plans to return our economy and lives back to normal after the threat of infection by COVID-19 is past. I'm sure you have some thoughts about this. There is some excitement and relief to think that maybe the worst is past and that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Some of you may be excited in hearing about the latest lifting of restrictions whereby lawn companies may begin business, golf courses may open, and boating season may begin. Others of you may feel a tinge of fear at any kind of relaxing of restrictions at this time, feeling that it is all too soon. And on all of our minds are these questions: "When can we return to normal? What might that normal look like? Will things ever really be normal?"

Many authorities and experts have studied not only the spread of this virus, but what there is to learn from other epidemics of the past. And they are giving us messages that we may not want to hear. Not only may a return to normal not be coming as quickly as you or I might like, but a return to the normal we had before COVID-19 will not be possible, at least not until a vaccine is developed and ready for use. Most authorities believe the transmission of the Virus will taper off as the result of social distancing, improved treatment plans for those who do catch the virus, and a leveling and eventual dropping off of new cases as the virus runs its course. Some expect that it will disappear in the same manner that the influenza virus does every year when we head towards summer. Others disagree. But even if that is the case, will that bring about a return to normal? Most likely the answer is no.

Just for starters there are many businesses who have shut their doors as the fall out of the Executive Orders to Shelter at Home. Due to loss of revenue some may not reopen; those that could not survive the extended quarantine that disrupted business. And what lasting effect might this have on us, the consumer? We are creatures of habit. That means that while many will flood the restaurants, bars, sports arenas, and other pastimes that have been made off limits when Shelter at home is lifted, there may be some things that we've learned to live without. Pastimes that we used to enjoy may no longer be there for us. And we may no longer be there for them. People, whose company we used to enjoy may no longer be here to do things with, their lives taken by the Virus. These are all examples of loss in our lives, and loss brings about grieving.

When things we value are taken from us, whether its pastimes or people or possessions, that results in us experiencing grief. The fact is that right now we can't be sure what those things will be, or who amongst our family, friends, and acquaintances may be taken by the Virus. Eventually we will be looking for a new normal. But what that new normal might look like is unknown, and that causes fear to rise in our hearts. Fear, coupled with grief, causes distress, anguish, and hopelessness. And many find themselves dealing with these

things in isolation, which adds to the depth and strength of these feelings. With this in mind, Psalm 116 speaks to God's people today in a timely fashion.

### **The Psalmist song: then and now**

Psalm 116 has no author attributed to it. Neither can we cite any specific thing in the life of an individual or the history of the nation of Israel that is definitely the cause and inspiration for this song of worship to the Lord. What we do know from the text is that severe trouble, distress, and torment had befallen the writer. He describes the suffering as being like the suffering one might experience in eternal hell, suffering that has a physical, emotional, and spiritual dimension. And it seems that this suffering was not the direct result of the psalmist actions. Instead it came and found him.

Sound familiar? No one I know of in this country willingly and purposefully did anything to create this Pandemic. Most of those who spread and transmit this Virus do so unaware that they have it. There are those who, out of the selfishness of their own hearts, refuse to think of the welfare of others and spread the infection. But this is more an action of naïve and selfish thinking than purposeful working to cripple the nation and bring hardship on us. With COVID-19 we have unwanted and un-sought-after trouble finding us. And like the psalmist it can feel like the snares of death wrapping around us. The psalmist paints a picture of a snare: rope or cord surrounding an unexpected victim and trapping them so they cannot escape. Certainly, this describes those who become infected with the Virus and must be hospitalized. They struggle to breathe because of their lungs filling with mucus, feeling like the ropes of death surrounding and constricting their lungs. But we, who for our own safety must Shelter in place, bound to remain at home, unable to enjoy the company of friends and family, may feel as if those ropes are wrapping around us too. It can be like a heaviness that weighs upon us, especially since we have known the comfort and joy of Christian fellowship. To be stuck in our homes makes the same walls that provide us with safety also seem like a prison. The distress and anguish many feel sheltering in place is real and hard to take.

So then, let's take advice and comfort from the psalmist's experience. Instead of continuing to grieve and languish in fear, and worry, and depression, he turned to someone outside himself for help. But who did he turn to? Many of us turn to the experts: to government, spokesmen for the CDC, health experts, sociologists, scientists, and the like. And to some extent these are sources of wisdom and guidance given by God. But perhaps we forget that many of these voices speak only the wisdom of man. They fail to understand the wisdom of God because they do not believe in God, or at least a God who can change the course of human history. For them the answer to this crisis must come from mankind itself. And truthfully, if that is the only place we have to turn, we might as well give in to depression and despair right now. But mankind is not the place the psalmist turns.

## **The Deliverance we have in Christ**

He turns to the LORD and cries out for deliverance. And the LORD, who is gracious and merciful inclines His ear to hear his cries, and for the psalmist, as well as us, this is a huge promise! None of us by our own hands deserves to be heard. We are guilty of letting fear get the best of us so that our lives are ruled by it and not by faith. We have put too much trust, faith, and even hope in the words of men, while failing to turn our ear to the words of the Lord who gives to us the good gifts us government, doctors and medicine, and health experts. But His gift that is even better is promise to not only hear but to react to our cries to Him for help. Even through we don't deserve to be heard, our gracious and merciful God hears and answers in love.

He knows the trouble we are going through. He knows the feelings of fear, despair, loneliness, and hopelessness that fill our hearts. He knows because His Son experienced all those emotions during His life on this earth. He does not wait for us to turn to Him, instead He comes to us. Just as He came to those disciples walking the road to Emmaus, despairing and grieving the future they had hoped and dreamed of that had just recently been dashed to pieces. They were mourning and grieving (**Luke 24:19b-21a**) <sup>19b</sup> **"Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, <sup>20</sup> and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. <sup>21</sup> But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel."** Jesus came to them in the midst of their mourning and revealed to them that what had happened was not defeat, not the end, but instead was victory. It was fulfillment of God's plan from before the foundation of the world to save His sinful creatures from their deserved punishment of eternal death. And it came about through all that had happened to Jesus at the hands of those chief priests and rulers. Today, right now, He comes to us with the same message of deliverance planned by God from before the beginning of the world.

Peter describes what Christ suffered as the answer to our despair. (**1 Peter 1:18-21**) <sup>18</sup> **knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. <sup>20</sup> He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you <sup>21</sup> who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.** It was Jesus shedding His blood, giving His life, so that we, who deserve eternal death, would not receive what we have earned, but instead receive all that Christ died and rose again to give us. We receive forgiveness for all the times we doubt, and all the times we turn away from Him to turn to men for the help that only He can give: salvation from the eternal death that we deserve, and the eternal life that we could never deserve, that He won for us. He gives to us not just eternal life someday, but life lived with Him now; His presence to walk with us and comfort us during times of isolation and grieving.

How can you know that all these things have been given to you? How can you know, trust, and believe these are yours even as the Virus rages around you and your life has been turned upside down? Because **(1 Peter 1:23) you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;** born again through the Spirit's gift of faith given in the Gospel Message. A gift that comes to your ears as you hear the word of Christ proclaimed to you. The gift that came to you in the water that was joined with God's word in Baptism, and in the gift that we receive in the bread and wine of Holy Communion when we partake of Christ's body and blood. You have a new birth through the gift of faith, a new life in the gift of baptism, a new hope in the midst of times of isolation, fear, and grieving. The hope that comes from above.

### **Our prayerful, thankful, worshipful response**

It is through this gift of faith that we can join in the confession of the psalmist (**Psalm 116:3-9**) <sup>3</sup> **The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. <sup>4</sup> Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!" <sup>5</sup> Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful. <sup>6</sup> The LORD preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me. <sup>7</sup> Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you. <sup>8</sup> For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling; <sup>9</sup> I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.** We join in with the same confession, sharing the same faith that allowed the psalmist to turn to the LORD and cry out for mercy

Now this being a psalm, which was poetry set to music, it was written to be sung as a hymn of worship and praise in the Temple of God in Jerusalem. The psalmist made his confession a public declaration of how God had saved him. It was to be used in building up of the faith of his fellow worshipers. Shouldn't this psalm have the same purpose among us? That is why it is the text for today's message. And through the gift of technology this message can go out to you, even as you are kept from joining us here in this Sanctuary. But should this be the answer to how the LORD wants to build us up going forward?

For that answer we turn to the best place to understand God's will, His word. **Hebrews 10:23-25** <sup>23</sup> **Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, <sup>25</sup> not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.** **Colossians 3:12-14** <sup>12</sup> **Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup> And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.** We do have a call to love our brother and sister in Christ. We have a call to protect them from harm, especially those who are most vulnerable to infection. But we also are called to join Him here, where He

promises His real presence will be. **Colossians 3:15-17** <sup>15</sup> **And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.** <sup>16</sup> **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.** <sup>17</sup> **And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

And from **Psalm 116:12-14** <sup>12</sup> **What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me?** <sup>13</sup> **I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD,** <sup>14</sup> **I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.** We are called to return thanks and praise to our God for all His merciful acts of salvation, certainly in the privacy of our homes, but not just there. We are called to praise and thank God in the same manner as the Psalmist, gathered in the LORD's house. That does not mean this Sanctuary that I now stand in. By itself this is not the Lord's House. The Lord's house is wherever His called and redeemed people gather together in the unique fellowship we call the Church.

## **Conclusion**

The effect that this Virus has upon us, and the possibility that it could cause either our death or the death of a loved one naturally brings fear. The solution of protecting ourselves and our loved ones by Sheltering in Place, while good and effective for now, also brings isolation, and with it, depression. As we look into the future and consider that the old normal is gone, we experience the pangs of grief. While we can and should listen to those people in government and in the health field that God has provided to grant us earthly wisdom, we should never allow their voice to be the only voice. Over and above what they have to say stands God's Word to us. His Word of grace and mercy in Jesus Christ is the only answer to combat fear, isolation, and grief.

Therefore, now more than ever, when [(**Psalm 116:1-6**) <sup>3</sup> **The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish.** <sup>4</sup> **Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!"** <sup>5</sup> **Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful.** <sup>6</sup> **The LORD preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me.**] When fear, depression, and isolation take their toll, call upon the name of the LORD. He is gracious and merciful. He will come and save you, lift you up, and restore the peace and joy that only He can give. These are the gifts that He freely gives us when we gather together for worship. The gifts He uses to build one another up so that we might be empowered to share His Gospel with all those suffering and lacking the hope that we have within us. May that hope remain alive in your hearts and minds this day. Be in prayer for me and for the Elders, as we look ahead for how and when we might restore the gathering together of all of us for Word and Sacrament worship once more. Amen