

- Psalm 95 -

Psalm 95 begins with praise, but as we move through the Psalm we find an abrupt change in tone, we find words of instruction, “do not harden your hearts.” (8) In other words “do not forget.” Do not forget what God has done for you and what God has brought you through. The specific reference is to an event in Israel’s history. Meribah and Massah are places in Israel’s exodus journey out of Egypt to Canaan.

The people of God were called to remember the Exodus story. The story began after 400 years of slavery in Egypt. With instructions from God, Moses asked Pharaoh to set Abraham’s expanded family free. After each refusal, God warning sent plagues on the gods and people of Egypt.

The losses were devastating- but God protected the people of Israel. God continued to watch after the people. The angel of death passed over their homes on the fateful last night of plague. They passed through the waters of the Red Sea. Then God provided direction and substance for the people as they journeyed. What did the people do? They looked into an uncertain future, they forgot and they complained. “your fathers tested and tried me though they had seen what I did.” (9)

The result of forgetting is tragic. “They shall never enter my rest.” (11) People that forget God’s faithfulness are naturally restless.

Our church, community, nation, and world continue to face uncertain times in the face of covid-19. We are facing uncertain times concerning health and our ability to work and provide for our families. It is important to remember that God has been faithful.

I received a call of encouragement from a friend many of you know. He was an adolescent living in Holland during the days of German occupation in World War 2. He wanted me to know he and his wife were cared for. He admitted that the threat of the virus was real, and then added, “at least the bombs are not falling.” He remembered God’s faithfulness. We all have stories of God’s faithfulness. God has brought us through celebrations and sorrows and God will bring us through this crisis.

The present challenges are real. Who knows what we may have to face? But we know that God will give us grace at the time we need the grace. But here is the question that haunts me; “After God brings me through, will I forget?” Will I forget that God brought me through, but also, will I forget the lessons God taught me along the way?

These are days of testing with broken routines of work, recreation, and relationships. Our normal interactions and distractions have been taken away. I have been pleasantly surprised to see how people have adapted. I have seen more people, families out of doors. They are in the parks with appropriate social distancing interacting and exercising. They seem happy. Strangers for the most part seem to have an attitude of helpfulness, an “we are all in this together” attitude. I pray that people are also using time away from entertainment and other demands to be still and to seek God in our time of need. I know I am seeking God with a new intensity.

So what happens when we get through this? People will react in different ways. Some people may blame God. Others will credit an escape to good fortune. Others will give praise to God. It will also be important to develop a new dependency on God, to enter into his “rest.” This is a time to develop good habits of prayer, reading, caring for those near and far, focusing on relationships, depending less on diversion and amusement. We cannot go back to business as usual.

I leave you with a challenge and two prayers. The challenge: what healthy physical and spiritual habits are you developing in these challenging times? The prayers are from Psalm 95:1-7 and from Psalm 23.