

Psalm 5:7-12

7 But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house, I will bow down toward your holy temple in awe of you. 8 Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me. 9 For there is no truth in their mouths; their hearts are destruction; their throats are open graves; they flatter with their tongues. 10 Make them bear their guilt, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; because of their many transgressions cast them out, for they have rebelled against you. 11 But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, so that those who love your name may exult in you. 12 For you bless the righteous, O LORD; you cover them with favor as with a shield.

The theme for the third Sunday of Advent is joy. I invite you to think about the things in your life that bring you the most joy. For me personally, it is my family, friends, and the Lord. As I thought about it, it occurred to me that what I value the most is relationships. I am truly thankful for God engaging in a relationship with us. I am the most thankful for the Lord for giving me the very best gift ever. The gift of pure unselfish love is also the very best gift that God has to offer.

I was recently engaged in a conversation with a man that was concerned about his daughter because she did not believe. I sensed that he held some expectation that was more about his disappointment than about her seeking. As we were talking I began to wonder why she is a non-believer. I wonder if it was due to coercion with his faith being forced on her with the expectation that she is to believe like he believes. People don't say that but they deliver the message in their daily living. Maybe it is due to hypocrisy where she has witnessed people preaching one thing but not living by it. It could be some form of condemnation whereupon she was judged by the self righteous that criticize but take no responsibility for pushing people away. I wonder what would happen if instead of forcing his religion on her, the focus was on the tremendous love of the Lord.

Imagine your father giving to you the very best gift you have ever received. Maybe it was a college education, or a house, or a car. Imagine if your father had to sacrifice in order to make this gift possible. Now imagine how your father would feel if you reject that gift. You see, that is exactly the position God is in whenever someone rejects Jesus. We have the very best gift ever. We have a tremendous gift of love that comes with extreme sacrifice. Now don't take my word for it; seek for yourself. I suspect that most people who choose not to believe have never really had the chance to truly experience God's love.

In the Scripture, the psalmist has people against him. They are evil, arrogant, boastful, and violent. The psalmist is a victim of deception, and violent schemes bent on destruction. They aren't just against him; these things are vices that go against the will of God. Therefore, they are actually in willful rebellion against God and reject the Lord's sovereignty. The psalmist needs help so he makes an appeal for intervention from God, the defender of the righteous. The psalmist hopes and expects a favorable response to his prayer that his enemies will stand before God and be punished according to their guilt. The prayer is a plea for the Lord's attention to bless the righteous and grant protection.

The psalmist is a true believer. He is convinced that God rules and he affirms the sovereignty of God and trusts that God will deliver him from his enemies. In the Old Testament, salvation is given to the righteous that are steadfast in faith and follow the ways of the Lord. The joy of the righteous is founded upon God's sovereignty that is not exercised as absolute power but as committed love. Those who love and depend on the Lord have reason for joyful praise, because God is the final administrator of justice.

The lesson is an affirmation of God's reign while waiting patiently for wickedness to be rejected and righteousness to be favored. The theology of the psalmist is that the righteous are those that love, trust, and depend on God. The predicament of the psalmist is that God's reign has not yet fully manifested because God gives people a choice, a chance to willfully choose the way of God. So, God gives people time to make their choice and time to repent from making the wrong choice. Whereas, the righteous are open to God's instruction and the wicked live only for themselves.

All of us are under the power of sin and are influenced by temptation and deception. We all need repentance and dependence on grace. The challenge for all of us is our decision of which camp we are aligned with; those that live for themselves at the expense of others, or those that seek refuge in the Lord. Of the utmost importance are self-examination and a request forgiveness and deliverance from evil. Our joy is found in our relationship with the Lord and the journey of seeking God's favor.