

Psalm 107

This is not the sermon I was intending to write for this Sunday. If you joined us last week or watched the video on Facebook, you may know that last week, we started a four-week message series on the Lord's Prayer designed to bring us through the depths of that prayer phrase by phrase so that we pray that prayer... prayerfully... rather than letting it be the collection of words we say at the end of the pastoral prayer and before we sing again. And I was all poised to prepare a message on "Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done," talking about how God has a will, a vision for what the world could look like if we, God's beloved children, did not have what Francis Spufford described as "the human propensity to foul things up." And that by praying "thy will be done" we are actively choosing to let our wills fall by the wayside and work for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

But then the phone rang on Tuesday night, and Rachelle Stephens, who was watching our dog while we were in Omaha, simply said, "It's bad." And then my phone chirped at 2:00 a.m. Wednesday morning with a text message with the words tornado and Burke, which led to more than few hours of scanning Facebook, and switching over to Twitter, and then checking out Snapchat, and trying to find more information, and praying.

I've been thinking about how to express God's good news today. Because this is the day that God has made. Because today is Sunday, a day where every week we celebrate and remember the resurrection of Jesus, the good news that the worst things is never the last thing, and that we have new life and life in Jesus' name regardless of what happened in the previous week. And I did the best thing that I could think to do: listen. I wanted and still want to hear what others are experiencing, hear how others are

processing, and even to hear how people are mourning. And the overwhelming thing I heard was a mix of stress and thankfulness. Both of which make sense.

This got me to thinking about our scripture for this morning: Psalm 107, a collection of stories of God's deliverance amid trying circumstances. And this just seemed like the Psalm for today. Throughout the psalm, the author testifies to God's mighty and saving hand. As we read the psalm, we see each group of people crying out to God. Some wandered in desert wastelands with no inhabited town. Hungry and thirsty, they felt their end near. So, as they came to the end of themselves, they cry to God, and God provides. Have you felt like you're at the end of yourself in the past few days? Some were prisoners who had rebelled against God, they were sentenced to a common punishment: hard labor. And in their distress, they cried to God; God heard them and brought them out of their gloom. Has anyone done hard labor in the past few days? Are any thankful that we have padded pews? Some were seafarers caught in a storm who cried out to God in the midst of being tossed upon the waves of the sea. And God stilled the storm. God didn't keep them from going through the storm altogether, but God stilled the storm. Has anyone felt like they've been tossed on the waves of life and are need of God to just stop the storm?

Story after story of God's goodness, God's grace, God's love, and God's mercy told in the Psalm. All of them reflecting that even in the midst of hardship, this is who God is; this is how we've experienced God before and will again. This is the gospel good news that we hear about and learn about in Jesus who personified God's character and nature so that the world would know and love and proclaim God's love. And I feel like we

continue to write Psalm 107 in our very day. I've heard stories over the past few days that point us to God and fill us with thanksgiving or will if we aren't there yet.

So, the rest of this message is part prayer, part reflection, part naming what I've heard and what we've experienced over the past few days.

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. Some were volunteer fire fighters giving command and organizing the whole community that had turned out to help. They ensured the safety of beloved neighbors, gave directions, provided support. They worked from dawn to dusk, overwhelmed and exhausted, wanting nothing more than a hot shower and to put their feet up. But the fire whistle blew, interrupting a brief moment of relaxation, and they responded as they had been trained. They cried out to God in their exhaustion and God provided them with assurance that they're living into God's call on their lives.

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. Some were county highway workers ensuring that our roads were passable, replacing culverts and crossings washed away from the storm. But then another four inches of rain came and washed those same culverts out once again. But rather than throwing their hands up in disgust, they cried out God in their need. God provided them with the energy they needed to put culverts back in their places for what felt like the hundredth time this year.

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. Some aren't ready to do that and remain distraught because these past few days have been a hell they never imagined. And that is okay. They lost homes, senses of safety and security, and prized possessions. Their rooves took

off with kitchen cabinets still connected. They lost businesses and livelihoods, places that they had literally built with their own hands. Their insurance adjustors showed up and refused to enter their buildings fearing for their own safety. They cried out to God in their pain and were comforted by someone praying, someone hugging, someone nodding. Someone being tangibly the presence of God to them.

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. Some are school board members and administrative personnel meeting at a table in the middle of Washington Street with a hand-written agenda trying to figure out where to start and what to do with literally the community watching. Some are teachers putting all their preparations on hold because the future is uncertain. They looked over their shoulders at the beloved school and hung their head. They cried out to God in their discernment and God will reveal the best way forward and ensure that this is a great school year for all involved.

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. Some had nothing but minor damage to their dwelling or property and did not know how to feel. Some feel a mix of genuine thankfulness and shame at that feeling. They turned to God in their confusion and God showed them all the work that can be done around them.

I know it has been hard. I know it may be hard again in the coming days and weeks. But we're #BurkeStrong, and we're also #GodStrong. And this is the good news of God for you and for me and for all. Amen.