

Jan 26 Lectionary Message:

Texts: Psalm 27:1, 4-9

Texts: Isaiah 9:1-4

Texts: 1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Texts: Matthew 4:12-23

Introduction:

People of God! We continue our walk through our Lectionary Texts, today's are from Psalm 27, Isaiah, 1 Corinthians, and Matthew.

I'm going to summarize what I think they're about in the most general, principle-driven way. And then I'm going to bring these passages together in a way that has made sense to me this week. I expect some of us will think that how I do that makes no sense at all, and I'm okay with that.

Honestly, you know: I preach all the time. It's not a difficult thing, really. It's just...part of the job, right? We all do things that most of us don't do, because we're all different people. And how God might take me, four passages of Scripture, a hefty pour of the Spirit, and shake it up, pouring out whatever I'm about to say isn't necessarily what would be poured out if God shook you up instead of me. But both might be refreshing and good to some of us.

So I want us to be people who think critically about whatever it is that comes out of my mouth, you know? And be people who, oh, give voice to whatever it is God leads us to discover when we gather together with the Spirit and the Bible.

Today, four passages. First: A prayer.

Prayer:

Great Expectations:

Unlike last week, I want to again read to us each of the passages that we heard today. They're small. It won't be hard.

Two of the passages are intimately related. The first is from Isaiah, which the second, Matthew, quotes. We won't start with those. We'll start with Psalm 27, a Psalm of David, because...well, because in part Psalms stand outside of time. They were written in moments, of course; historically-centered, the way any lament or praise or hope is centered in a moment, a situation. But God's People have prayed them for so long in so many different spaces that it becomes easy to simply look at them without worrying about what and when and why they were written. And this is the oldest bit of Bible that we have today, so...oldest first. Age before beauty, I guess.

Psalm 27: Sanctuary

We read this:

***The Lord is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?***

***The Lord is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?***

***2 When the wicked advance against me
to devour[a] me,***

***it is my enemies and my foes
who will stumble and fall.***

***3 Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;***

***though war break out against me,
even then I will be confident.***

***4 One thing I ask from the Lord,
this only do I seek:***

***that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,***

***to gaze on the beauty of the Lord
and to seek him in his temple.***

5 For in the day of trouble

he will keep me safe in his dwelling;

***he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent
and set me high upon a rock.***

6 Then my head will be exalted

above the enemies who surround me;

***at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of
joy;***

I will sing and make music to the Lord.

7 Hear my voice when I call, Lord;

be merciful to me and answer me.

8 My heart says of you, "Seek his face!"

Your face, Lord, I will seek.

9 Do not hide your face from me,

do not turn your servant away in anger;

you have been my helper.

Do not reject me or forsake me,

God my Savior.

At its most basic, this is a passage about a person who sees God as their safe sanctuary, rather than any other person or place. And I choose the word "sanctuary" on purpose, because like most of David's Psalms, this is a psalm about the Temple, about the sanctified, intrinsically holy place where God resides with God's People. But we use sanctuary to talk about safe place, a place where we're safe from all our troubles, at peace and can relax without worry of harm or anxiety or difficulty.

God is the place of sanctuary, of retreat. No island far from people, or idol that provides false power or peace can give what God can give. That's the message of this passage: Sanctuary, rest is found in God, not in idols or islands, not far from people or in things that promise power but can't save us.

And we can move from oldest to youngest, leap from Psalms to Corinthians.

Corinthians: Allegiance

We'd read this:

10 I appeal to you, brothers and sisters,[a] in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. 11 My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. 12 What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas[b]"; still another, "I follow Christ."

13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. 16 (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

At its most basic this passage is about commitments, about allegiances. Paul reminds the early congregation

in Corinth something that the far more recent congregation on Smoky Row needs to remember, which is simply that our allegiance is to Christ, not to another person or to another party. Our allegiance is to Christ, not to person, or party. To divide as the Corinthians are dividing is to rebuild the very wall that Jesus tore down, to uncreate God's People. It's to act like the anti-Christ, and destroy the work of God, by making our favorite person more important than the person who has granted us favor, and make commitment to our favorite person more important than commitment to God's People.

Paul needs the Corinthians to return to Christ, and give Christ their allegiance, their loyalty, their fandom and all the stuff that comes when you follow someone. Jesus is their standard for character. Jesus' way of life and teaching is what they are to be committed to. Jesus keeping his promises is the substance of the hopes of their lives. Our allegiance is to Christ, not a person or party, no matter how much power or persuasion they have.

And two other passages were read today, not only here, but wherever Christians have gathered on this Sunday morning, even if their Sunday morning is hours from now or was hours before. They were from Isaiah, and from Matthew.

Isaiah: Relief

We heard, from Isaiah 9:

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—

***2 The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.***

***3 You have enlarged the nation
and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice
when dividing the plunder.***

***4 For as in the day of Midian's defeat,
you have shattered
the yoke that burdens them,
the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor.***

This is a passage promising relief. Relief that will express itself in joy, in pleasure, in excitement, but those emotions that it describes are the effect of the relief that God promises will come on his People when he saves them from those who have been threatening and oppressing them.

In Isaiah, it's a prophetic passage to let them know that even though Assyria had destroyed the Northern Kingdom, and that they threatened the Southern Kingdom, too, that there would be relief for Israel. Distress will end. Joy will come. Relief will come, because God will save them.

Matthew: Taking Isaiah

Matthew when he writes his Gospel remembers this famous promise of relief. He writes this.

12 When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. 13 Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— 14 to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

***15 “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—
16 the people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of
death
a light has dawned.”[f]***

***17 From that time on Jesus began to preach,
“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come
near.”***

Jesus Calls His First Disciples

18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” 20 At once they left their nets and followed him.

21 Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, 22 and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Now. Let me be perfectly honest about how Matthew uses Isaiah's passage.

Much of the early part of Isaiah--Isaiah in general, frankly--became associated with Messianic expectations, became promises that God fulfilled not only hundreds of years before during Isaiah's own life, but became passages people expected God to live up to, somehow, in the future, when Israel would be truly and fully saved because God would come to be with His People.

And Matthew uses this passage from Isaiah basically as a proof-text, as a way to highlight that this moment

from Jesus' life, it's one more way in which Jesus' life lines up with Isaiah's expectations about what the Messiah would do, so, you know, Jesus is that guy. Mathew won't write as much as the other Gospel authors will about how Jesus' work is for the Gentiles, as he hints at here. For Matthew, this passage is about place: Jesus was active in Galilee, as we were promised the Messiah would be. Matthew doesn't lean on this passage as one of relief, but as proof that Jesus is who God says Jesus is.

And he goes from this Isaiah passage to talk about commitment and purpose: Follow me, and I'll send you out to fish for people. I will reimagine your work in light of how God wants to use you in the world, and if you follow me, you can imagine your work as I see it. God's asking that those who follow him see themselves in a new way, commit to him and see the work he sets them to as valid work, good work, Messianic work. We aren't given, here, any deep insight into what it means to fish for people, although bajillions of Christians have planted their flag in this or that definition. What I want us to see is this commitment Jesus is asking of them: Whatever else it is, it is like work, and it demands a commitment to learn, an apprenticeship under him just like all work demanded.

Whatever else our commitment to Christ is, it is like work, and it demands a commitment to learn from him, to apprenticeship under him just like all work

demanded then. This is what Matthew reminds us today.

Summaries:

Today's Psalm reminds us that sanctuary, rest is found in God, not in idols or islands, not far from people or in things that promise power but can't save us.

Isaiah makes the point that God will relieve his people from what troubles them, and with that relief they'll experience all the good things that relieved people feel. Corinthians reminds us that our allegiance is to Christ, not to a person or a party, no matter how much power or persuasion they have. And Matthew points out that to be committed to Christ is to apprentice under him, and allow his work to become our work.

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Let me try to bring these things together in a personal way. Because I think one way to understand these passages is to consider them in light of a question, a simple one: “How are you?” “How are you?”

“How are you?”

Again, today’s Psalm reminds us that sanctuary, rest is found in God, not in idols or islands, not far from people or in things that promise power but can’t save us. And I can begin here: Right now I don’t feel the sanctuary of God. I’m not seeking it in idols, or in islands. I’m not trying to escape far away from people, thinking to be away would bring me rest, nor do I feel like someone “out there” is going to save me in some way. But neither do I feel the sense of peace and safety and rest, all that characterizes sanctuary, when it comes to God. Right now. There are times when I feel this; right now is not one of them.

Isaiah makes the point that God will relieve his people from what troubles them, and with that relief they’ll experience all the good things that relieved people feel.

Right now, honestly, I don’t feel much relief in the Lord. I know things; I have pretty well-examined theology, right? But I don’t feel that peace that surpasses all understanding, or the hope that’s built on nothing less than Jesus Christ and his

righteousness. I'm just not moved by my salvation right now. I have enough faith to pray with the psalmist, "Restore to me the joy of my salvation," and that's it.

Hear me: There are times when I experience God as sanctuary, and feel the relief of my salvation. I don't right now. And that's just, like...whatever. It's not nothing, but it's not everything. And here's why:

Because Corinthians reminds us that our allegiance is to Christ, not to a person or a party, no matter how much power or persuasion they have, I'm reminded that others don't have a right to determine my feelings for me or tell me what to feel. Because Matthew points out that to be committed to Christ is to apprentice under him, and allow his work to become our work, I'm reminded that what matters is not my feelings, but my obedience. Taken together, these passages remind me of a very basic Christian truth: To follow Christ is to say that what I feel sometimes doesn't matter, right? What I feel doesn't always matter, and I am not beholden to my feelings, nor does any other person have a right to tell me what to feel.

I can hold my feelings in my heart, hold them in my head, but master them, rather than be mastered by them. Taken together, Corinthians and Matthew reveal that it is what I do that matters, not what I feel on a given Sunday or Wednesday or Monday.

Conclusion:

And so, what I'd suggest these Lectionary passages suggest for us, as I take them together this morning, is simply this: We must persist. We must persist in following the Lord, no matter what else is asked of us, no matter what we feel. We don't follow people or party--Corinthians reminds us that. We don't retreat to idols or islands--Psalm 27 reminds us that. God has offered us relief and sanctuary in the middle of a turmoil- and sin-filled world, but what we look forward to experiencing in full we only ever experience in part until Jesus' return. And so, until that time comes, we persist in faithfulness, we don't seek sanctuary in idols, safety in islands, we don't allow parties or people to splinter us from Christ. We just persist.

This, of course, is my take. I wonder what yours is?