**Sunday, November 8th, 2020**

**Psalms 40 & 100**

An old man walks down a Florida beach.

The sun sets like an orange ball on the horizon.

The waves slap the sand.

The smell of saltwater stings the air.

The beach is vacant.

No sun to entice the sunbathers.

Not enough light for the fishermen.

So, aside from a few joggers and strollers, the gentleman is alone.

He carries a bucket in his bony hand.

A bucket of shrimp.

It is not for him.   It is not for the fish.

It is for the sea gulls.

He walks to an isolated pier cast in gold by the setting sun.

He steps out to the end of the pier.

The time has come for the weekly ritual.

He stands and waits.

Soon the sky becomes a mass of dancing dots.

The evening silence gives way to the screeching of birds.

They fill the sky and then cover the moorings.

They are on a pilgrimage to meet the old man.

For a half hour or so, the bushy browed, shoulder-bent gentleman

          will stand on the pier, surrounded by the birds of the sea,

          until his bucket is empty.

But even after the food is gone, his feathered friends still linger.

They linger as if they are attracted to more than just food. They perch on his hat.

They walk on the pier. And they all share a moment together.

The old man on the pier couldn't go a week without saying "Thank you."

His name was Eddie Rickenbacker.

During the war he was reported missing at sea.

He had been sent on a mission

          to deliver a message to General Douglas MacArthur.

With a handpicked crew, in a B-17 known as the "Flying Fortress,"

          he set off across the south Pacific.

Somewhere the crew became lost, the fuel ran out, and the plane went down.

All eight crew members escaped into the life rafts.

They battled the weather, the water, the sharks, and the sun.

But most of all, they battled the hunger.

After 8 days, their rations were gone.

They ran out of options.

It would take a miracle for them to survive.

And a miracle occurred.

After an afternoon devotional service, the men said a prayer, and tried to rest.

As Rickenbacker was dozing with his hat over his eyes,

          something landed on his head, and he knew it was a sea gull.

He didn't know how he knew; he just knew.

That gull meant food – if he could catch it.

And he did.

The flesh was eaten.

The intestines were used as fish bait.

And the crew survived.

But what was a sea gull doing hundreds of miles away from land?

Only God knows.

Whatever the reason, Rickenbacker was thankful.

As a result, every Friday evening this old captain walked to the pier,

          his bucket full of shrimp and his heart full of thanks.

I imagine Rickenbacker could connect with many if the thoughts expressed

          in Psalm 40:

I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry.

He lifted me out of the slimy pit and gave me a firm place to stand.

He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.

Be pleased to save me, Lord; come quickly, Lord, to help me.

May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you;

          may those who long for your saving help always say, “The Lord is great!”

You are my help and my deliverer; you are my God, do not delay.

Eddie Rickenbacker could have seen himself in this Psalm.

When we feel lost, troubled, and frightened, we can turn to the Psalms

          and find ourselves, our feelings, our frustrations.

We can discover a Psalm which fits us.

Many of the books in the Old Testament are best read as a whole –

          like Jonah, Ruth, and Esther, to get the whole story.

However the Psalms are good to read only a few at a time.

Then we can pause and discover ourselves in their words,

          and we can remember God delivers us from trouble,

          the wait may be difficult , but we can be thankful for the outcome.

Reading the Psalms, we experience God day by day.

We can see Him working in our lives and in the lives of others

In the Psalms we discover great contrasts of mood: anguish, despair, joy,

          intimate personal communication with God, community celebration.

We find prayers of Thanksgiving and Praise, and Laments seeking help.

There are Songs of Faith and Trust, Confession, and Wisdom.

We discover hymns of Worship, and the Lord's Kingship over us.

Many Psalms retell the story of our History and Creation,

          and the mighty acts of God.

Great contrasts of mood can be seen throughout the Psalms:

          anguish, fear, despair, joy, hope, confidence, and celebration.

They offer no magical formulas to make troubles go away.

But the Psalms is like a Hymn Book for worship,

          or a Prayer Book for talking to God.

They lead us to having a Worshipful Heart, a confidence that God is with us.

For that reason, God gave us the Psalms – a Praise Book for God's people.

This collection of hymns and petitions are strung together by one thread –

          a heart hungry for God in all circumstances.

They provide sincere cries from the heart, songs for sorrow, as well as joy.

As you read through the Psalms,

          don't be too surprised if you find yourself in one of them.

For every emotion and mood, we can find a psalm to match.

The psalms wrestle with the deepest sorrow,

          and ask God the hardest questions about suffering and injustice.

Their voice is refreshingly spontaneous.

They do not tip flowery compliments toward God –

          they cry out to him, or shout for joy before him.

The people of those times did not find God distant and impersonal.

In almost every psalm you find the presence of God,

         not as a philosophical principle, but as an active, strong, and living ruler –

          a God who makes a difference in life.

The Psalms reflect in a hundred and fifty moods and experiences,

          the never changing reality of a strong and loving God

          who cares for his people.

The writers frequently asked: Where are you, God? Why don't you help me?

Despite their love for God, they often felt abandoned, misused, betrayed.

The joy and praise which saturate these prayers,

          came not from an absence of problems,

          but from a deep conviction their great God would overcome them.

And God still does.

AMEN