

9th Sunday after Trinity: August 1st, 2021

“Completely Surrounded”

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Psalm 54, from which the verses of the Introit are taken this morning, is a prayer of David who was fleeing from Saul. He was hiding at that time among the Ziphites. When they learned of it, they hunted for him to earn favor with Saul. He was surrounded by enemies. He was in terrible danger. So he cried to God:

- ¹ O God, save me by your name,
and vindicate me by your might.*
- ² O God, hear my prayer;
give ear to the words of my mouth.*
- ³ For strangers have risen against me;
ruthless men seek my life;
they do not set God before themselves.¹*

Is this not for what Christians should ask when they are surrounded by enemies? Of course it is, but asking this does something to David. While he is asking God to intervene, he comes to realize that he is already delivered by grace. It is as though he says: “I am surrounded by enemies. I do not know if I will live or die. But I do know what my final fate will be either way: I will go to the Lord. He will deliver me.”

While he is still surrounded then, with the request for intervention still upon his breath, he continues with a confession:

- ⁴ Behold, God is my helper;
the Lord is the upholder of my life.*
- ⁵ He will return the evil to my enemies;
in your faithfulness put an end to them.²*

¹ Psalm 54:1–3

² Psalm 54:4–5

There is nothing in the immediate sight of David that would lead him to confess this; David speaks by faith. He does not know that he will be spared physical death and put on the throne of Israel. He might be caught by the Ziphites and handed over to Saul to be murdered. But David is a believer. He trusts that God works all things together, even martyrdom, for those who love Him.

That is why he is able to conclude:

*⁶ With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you;
I will give thanks to your name, O LORD, for it is good.
⁷ For he has delivered me from every trouble,
and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies.* ³

Whether David lives or dies, the Lord has delivered him from every trouble, for the Lord has delivered him from sin and Hell by providing a Messiah to his substitute.

David comes to this realization as he is surrounded by enemies. By faith, He asks God to deliver him, and even though he doesn't know what the Lord will do, he knows that it will be good.

This is the foundation of prayer, the essence of faith. When we ask God to help us – we are in our most natural state. This is the relation of sheep to shepherd, children to father, and beggar to king. The Lord has not only the power to do good but He also has the wisdom and desire to do good. David is rightly unashamed to ask God for earthly gain – that he would not die but be delivered from the Ziphites. Yet at the same time he surrenders himself to God. He trusts that God will do what is best. While David doesn't know what the future holds for him, he does know what eternity holds. He has a Helper, the Messiah, who has and will uphold his life. That Helper has already delivered him from every trouble.

The Psalms, like our prayers, can be categorized in many ways, but at their base they are always petition or praise or a mingling of the two. We sometimes ask God for things without directly saying so or even by complaint, as in a lament, but in all cases prayer in Jesus' Name is prayer that asks God to be true to His compassion and mercy and respond to injustice.

³ Psalm 54:6–7

In a similar way our confession of sin, of hurt and fear, is a request for the Lord's forgiveness and mercy, for His intervention. To thank God is to praise Him. Less obvious is that our confession of His goodness, of His power, and even of His Trinitarian Name is also praise.

The movement between petition and praise is fluid and it goes both ways. In Psalm 54 David begins with his immediate need. In the first place his request for help is simply that; it is a real request based upon a real earthly need. He wants the Lord to deliver him from the Ziphites. It is also a confession that the Lord has the power to help and that David has the right to ask for help despite his sins, that the Lord cares about David and the problems in our lives. The asking awakens in David a remembrance of this. That moves him to praise God through a confession of who God has promised to be: his Helper and what God has already done: delivered him from every trouble.

It can also go the other way. The Nicene Creed is praise. In confessing who God is we are praising Him. We are praising Him for His wondrous deeds and mercy, for His revelation to us as Holy Trinity, for the Incarnation, for the gift of faith. In that praise we might well be moved at any point to petition. For example we might be moved by the phrase "He will come to judge the living and the dead" to pray for a blessed death, for the forgiveness of sins, for a speedy conclusion to this sad life and the reunion of saints to come on the last day.

That is what it is to be a Christian. It is to believe that God has delivered us by the death and resurrection of His Son from sin and Hell even when we are suffering or dying, even when we are being betrayed and are surrounded by enemies, that even when it seems that justice has failed and the wicked are prospering and there is nothing to live for: God Himself is our helper, the upholder of our life, and has already delivered us by the gift of His Son from every trouble.

To say that prayer is a privilege, an honor, that God loves and listens to us is too small a word. To say that it is a right is closer to the truth. You are God's children by Baptism. You are His Bride by declaration and Communion. You are His confident and friend. He Himself has not simply invited you to pray, but He has commanded it, decreed it to be so. Most true would be to say that prayer is faith itself.

It is who we are in Christ: we are beggars who ask God for things because we have no ability to provide them for ourselves; we are sheep who require His protection and food; we are children whom He must instruct and nurture, indeed we are His own Body whom He must feed and strengthen. So also we are those who rejoice in wonder, who praise Him, in natural response to His mercy, not as flattery, not because He deserves it, but because there is no other way to respond, to be, than to abandon ourselves, forget our embarrassment and pride, and sing because He is good and He has made us to sing, to confess, to praise, to pray.

***Behold, God is my helper;
the Lord is the upholder of my life.*** ⁴ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

⁴ Psalm 54:4

Prayer

L In peace let us pray to the Lord:

C **Lord, have mercy.**

L For the gift of divine peace and of pardon, with all our heart and with all our mind, let us pray to the Lord:

C **Lord, have mercy.**

L For the holy Christian Church, here and scattered throughout the world, and for the proclamation of the Gospel and the calling of all to faith, let us pray to the Lord:

C **Lord, have mercy.**

L For this nation, for our cities and communities, and for the common welfare of us all, let us pray to the Lord:

C **Lord, have mercy.**

L For seasonable weather and for the fruitfulness of the earth, let us pray to the Lord:

C **Lord, have mercy.**

L For those who labor, for those whose work is difficult or dangerous, and for all who travel, let us pray to the Lord:

C **Lord, have mercy.**

L For all those in need, for the hungry and homeless, for the widowed and orphaned, and for all those in prison, let us pray to the Lord:

C **Lord, have mercy.**

L For the sick and dying and for all those who care for them, let us pray to the Lord:

C **Lord, have mercy.**

L For those whom celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially *Ken & Tina*; that God would cause them to rejoice and give thanks for the forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, and that God would grant by His Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with God's saints the joys of eternal life; let us pray to the Lord:

C **Lord, have mercy.**

L For those whom God has granted another year of earthly life especially His servants, *Ken, Patrick, & Kevin*; that God would send His holy angels to guard and keep His children; that they may thank and praise him for the gift of life and for the protection and care He has provided; that God would grant them to grow in grace, continue to know His loving-kindness, abide in the confession of His care and protection, serve Him faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of His joys in heaven: let us pray to the Lord:

C **Lord, have mercy.**

L For the joy and blessings that God has granted *Dennis & Bonnie and Marvin & Ruth* during the years of their marriage; that God would assist them always by His grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards Him and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that He has promised; let us pray to the Lord:

C **Lord, have mercy.**

L Finally, for these and for all our needs of body and soul, let us pray to the Lord:

C **Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.**