



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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February 8, 2009
5th Sunday after Epiphany
Psalm 103:1-18
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Job 7:1-7
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 103
Second Lesson: Romans 8:28-30
Gospel: Mark 1:29-39

Do Not Forget God's Blessings

They are many
They lead to praise

What's the first word children learn? I suppose the women here this morning would say "mom" and the men here this morning would say "dad." Those are probably some of the first words, but I think quickly after that a couple of the words they learn become "no" and "mine." I don't know where these words come in, but I know they don't forget these words. Somewhere along the line they learn the phrase "I forgot," and then they just beat it to death, don't they? "Did you take out the trash?" "I forgot." "Did you pick up your room?" "I forgot." "Did you clean up the basement?" "I forgot." "Did you put on pants?" "I forgot"—they just say it out of habit sometimes.

As we get older and as adults we might not say "I forgot" but we sure forget a lot yet, don't we? Unless maybe we just really enjoy making "to do" lists. Don't we make those because otherwise we'd forget? We tend to be people that at times forget things. Sometimes there are prices to pay when you forget. Sometimes maybe there isn't. But our Lord knows us through and through and that's why some 3,000 years ago he had David write the words of the Psalm that I just read to you. He tells us in there, warns us and encourages us, "Don't forget the blessings that your God has given you." That is what we are inclined to do, especially when things start going not in the direction that we would like them to go. We focus on the things that are not going so well and we forget the benefits of the blessings of God.

So our God says to us this morning, "Don't forget my blessings." They are many. They are important. They are what lead us to praise our God.

It's a good thing we had more Scripture readings this morning after that first one, right? That first one from Job was kind of a downer, right? "Everything is bad Lord. I don't think anything is ever going to get better. Everything is bad and things are bad God. Here ends our reading." That's about what it was, wasn't it? Do you think maybe at times Job struggled with forgetting the blessings of God as he struggled with all of the things that he struggled with? He faced an awful lot of things, but as he faced them he came to the conclusion that God was unfair and he wanted to challenge God about how fair God was being in letting him suffer the way he was because he didn't deserve it. It's something that our Psalm talked about this morning also, wasn't it?

God doesn't treat us as we deserve. Did you notice how much God stressed the blessings that we are to remember are the ones that center in him not repaying us as we deserve? He doesn't repay us as our sins deserve. As far as the east is from the west; so far has he removed our sins from us. He forgives all my sins. He redeems my life from the pit. All these things—he kept coming back to this. It's like a steady drumbeat in this Psalm—God's forgiveness that he gives fully, freely and unconditionally to his people.

But here's the thing that I think happens sometimes when we read a Psalm like Psalm 103. We see those verses. Our mind goes "yes" God forgives our sins, but then we see some of the other verses and our eye goes back to those. Verse 3 says he forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. Which one do you focus on? If you are struggling with some kind of sickness right now, do you say "Heals all my diseases? I'm struggling with this. My diseases aren't being healed. What is God talking about here? He isn't being good to me. He isn't blessing me. He isn't giving me these blessings that I want."

The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. We read that and think "the oppressed are oppressed. How can there be justice for them?" He satisfied my desires with good things so that my youth is renewed like the eagles. If you are no longer in the age bracket that is defined as youth, do you feel like you are being renewed like eagles? Or do you feel the ravages of age as you try to stand up and sit down during the service, as you try to go up and down the steps?

When you hear some of the words of this Psalm, does your sinful nature say, "Hey wait a minute. God hasn't done that for me. God hasn't blessed me. God isn't being fair to me. God isn't being good to me." There are times in our lives when we are going to be facing certain struggles that maybe deal directly with some of those things and we'll hear those words and we'll forget all the other words that are around them. Around each one of those phrases, if the phrase is the meat in the sandwich, then the slices of bread on each side of it is God's love and forgiveness in Christ. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. He redeems my life from the pit and crowns me with love and compassion. That's the context in which he says he heals all my diseases. Do you think maybe he is pointing us to the fact that because he's taken away our sins, this world is just something that we are in for a time and that our eternity is in a place where there are no diseases, where our youth is restored like an eagle's, where there is no oppression? Do you think maybe because he is pointing us to the greatest blessing we have? He's telling us "Find your confidence in the love I have for you that took away all your sins and focus on the truth that heaven is your home" and that will help you to truly believe what we read in our Second Lesson—that God makes all things work out for our good.

Do you ever think that maybe some of the effects of aging are for our good so that we remember that this world is not where we are going to spend eternity but that we've got something better coming and so we don't set our sights just on the things of this world? Do you think maybe like St. Paul God allows some difficulty into our life of health so that

we learn to boast all the more in our weakness because then we have to rely on his strength?

Focus on these incredibly great blessings that our God has given us. You and I who are sinners who want to focus only on ourselves and think the whole world revolves around us have a God that in spite of that loved us so much that he lived and died in our place. He perfectly walked where you and I have not walked that perfect path. He took all of our sins to the cross and now he gives us his very body and blood to assure us we are forgiven. This isn't just pie in the sky by and by. This is the grace of our God touching our lives. He forgives us. He loves us.

God's blessings are made known to us. The Lord spoke to Moses. The Lord made his ways known to Moses the Psalm says. Did you ever stop and thank God for that? Did you ever realize what a blessing it is that God spoke through men like Moses and David and all the other writers of Scripture so that we aren't left wondering, "are we just hairless chimpanzees?" We know that God created us with a special purpose in his image. The rest of the things you could say are assembly line produced. He spoke and they came to be. But mankind he formed. Mankind he took the rib out from Adam and made Eve. He gave us his very image. We are handcrafted specialty products of God and he has restored in us his image as he leads us to believe that Jesus took away our sins. If God doesn't speak through Moses and the others, we don't know these things.

You and I are just not bright enough on our own to have human reason understand the ways of God. That's obvious in our lives. We get twisted around and turned upside down so often. We need God to speak to us in his Word over and over and over so that we remember these blessings, so that we don't focus on only what reason can see and understand because we just are not that bright. Left on our own, we'll screw it up.

That's why God urges us to focus on all these blessings, all these blessings that especially center on his love and his compassion and his forgiveness. Then, as we remember these blessings, our God says to us, "*Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul.*" This Psalm 103 comes in the middle of a whole section of Psalms that are called "Hallel Psalms," "Praise Psalms" where we are called upon to praise God. It's God telling us over and over to praise him.

Do you ever wonder why? Do you ever think maybe the Lord is just like an NFL wide receiver that just likes to hear his name? Is he just self obsessed, self absorbed that he's telling us to praise him so that he can feel better about himself? That's what our human reason might say. That's why I tell you again, our human reason is all screwed up.

God tells us to praise him out of his love because he knows the more often you and I spend time praising God for who he is and what he has done, and as we look in the Book of Psalms and we see that so often in the Book of Psalms praising God involves proclaiming what he has done, we spend time then in the Law and in the Gospel. And

as we praise him, God builds us up. God strengthens us. He tells us to praise him for our own benefit, not for his benefit, because the more you and I search the Scriptures and see all the different reasons we have to praise God, even in the middle of things we don't like, that we don't enjoy, we still have reasons to praise our God because he is with us with his love and his compassion, and he has promised never to abandon us to the things that trouble us in this lifetime.

The more we see all of these things, the more we will want to praise God, the more we will want to live for God because we will see who he is, who we are and just how incredible his love for us is in Christ. The more the part of us that loves God is built up in what God has done for us, the more we won't have to say, "God, I forgot to live for you. God, I forgot to praise you. God, I forgot to spend time with your Word or with your Sacraments." The more it will just naturally flow into our lives. And the more then we will become blessings to others.

That's why our God tells us, "Don't forget my many blessings."