

*see the end of this sermon*

Dear Friends in Christ,

“God is good...” “...All the time” That made the rounds a few years ago. It is a good statement. Actually, it is an excellent statement. It is a Scriptural statement. Some people pray this statement after every single meal: “O, give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endures forever.” God is good... all the time.

If you say this prayer after many of your meals, it can become rote. You just rattle it off without really thinking about it. Which isn't the best, but I would contend that it is better than not praying at meal time. But that is another topic for another time.

Don't let that prayer be meaningless mouthing of words. Let this evening's reading give it meaning, because Psalm 107 is where that prayer comes from. Let's study that prayer in its Biblical context.

This entire psalm is printed on the back of your bulletin. My apologies that it is a bit small. Space was limited and it is a fairly long psalm. If you don't have eyes or glasses keen enough to read the small print, don't worry, I will quote it often. If you do still have the eyes of youth, you will benefit from following along.

This psalm starts with the three verses of our sermon text: ***“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say this—those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.”*** After that it has four stanzas which give us four cases in point, four practical examples. Now if you look carefully at the psalm on page 8 in the bulletin, you will see extra spaces after some of the verses. You will see it after verse 3 which is the introduction, and then after verses 9, 16, 22 and 32. The spaces divide different crises, different “episodes” if you will, of this psalm.

Episode 1 opens in verse 4, ***“Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away.”*** Blazing sun, empty canteen, car out of gas, vultures circling.

Episode 2, verse 10, ***“Some sat in darkness and the deepest gloom, prisoners suffering in iron chains, for they had rebelled against the words of God... So he subjected them to bitter labor; they stumbled, and there was no one to help.”*** Slavery, no one to help, every day a drudgery; every night sleepless.

Episode 3, verse 17, ***“Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities. They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death.”*** Sounds 'bout like drug addiction: a foolish choice that leads to pain and hatred of life itself; eager for death.

Episode 4, verse 23, ***“Others went out on the sea in ships... [25] [The LORD] spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. They mounted up to the heavens and went***

***down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away.***” Completely out of control, at the mercy of nature, like a falling elevator, except in water. Fear—no—terror!

Dying in the desert; drowning in the sea; slavery; terminal illness – each episode describes the extremity of life, not just physical life, but also the limits of what the human soul can bear.

And each stanza says this: ***“Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.”*** Every single episode has the exact same wording. They cried out to the LORD. It didn’t matter if it was trouble of their own making (some of it was!) or of the LORD’s sending (some of it was!) or just simply the result of living in a sinful world (some of it was!), the best thing about all of these terrible disasters is that they caused people to cry out to the Lord in their trouble.

Who doesn’t need to rely on God more fully than we do? I know I do! Who doesn’t deserve God’s relentless punishment? I know I do! Who doesn’t feel the effects of living in a sinful world, even when it isn’t my fault? I know Jesus did! Yes, even Jesus!

And do you know what even Jesus did in his time of distress in a fallen world? ***“He cried out to the LORD!”***—exactly what Psalm 107 tells us these people did in their troubles. “Thoughts and prayers,” especially the prayer part, are the right answer in times of distress. The atheist world mocks us. You have heard them say it, “Don’t give me your ‘thoughts and prayers’. Do something.” Satan speaks through their mockery. Never be ashamed to pray. It is right to call out to the LORD in distress.

In each episode, after the problem and prayer, it then describes the LORD’s answer: ***“He led them to a city where they could settle... He brought them out of darkness and the deepest gloom and broke away their chains... He sent forth his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave... He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed.”*** The LORD brought them out of their crises. Each time it says, ***“Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love.”*** No matter where they came from, no matter what happened, let us thank God for his unfailing love!

How did you get here? How did you get here to this gathering of believers this evening. We know it has been a long path. We know that each of us has been shepherded through many years by our God. To some small extent we realize that the Lord has guided us through the events of life, that we are ***“The redeemed of the LORD.”*** It was God’s doing, not ours.

And it wasn’t just that Jesus died for us. God has been guiding the events of our lives, sometimes it has even been in spite of us. If we are honest, every Christian remembers the worst moments in our lives, like in episodes two and three of this psalm, where we were fools. We walked in rebellion against God. We knew what was wrong and we embraced it: the pleasures of this life; resentment of other people; turning a deaf ear to the needy; being selfish toward God. Look back at the days of your lives, the thousands of days, the tens of thousands of days, and you will not find a sterling silver service record to your God. There are demerits and write-ups and disciplinary hearings and more. Yet God blessed each of you to somehow not continue on your merry way to the fires of hell. Somehow he called you back. Maybe it was even unpleasant, even terrible! Maybe you ran up hard against God but it became a moment to turn back in repentance. And God reminded you that he has redeemed you from your sins only by the blood of his Son.

In episodes one and four we are reminded that we also live with the effects of life in a sin-

scarred world: losing money, people betraying, diseases afflicting, thieves scamming, accidents happening. This is not a time for us to lose hope but to turn to God in fervent prayer. And he will answer, he will deliver. And in each instance he draws us closer to him and we learn to treasure his many blessings. Each is a chance to thank and praise God.

But does God? Does he always deliver.

In about 160 AD, there was an aged man with a strange name. His name was Polycarp. His name is worth remembering and looking up later on the internet and finding a source document about. Polycarp was an aged Christian. Supposedly he was the last man alive who had been taught by Jesus' Apostles. Polycarp was arrested for his faith and one day brought into the stadium to be executed in the "games." Here I quote: "When the crowd heard that Polycarp had been captured, there was an uproar. The [Roman] Proconsul asked him whether he was Polycarp. On hearing that he was, he tried to persuade him to apostatize, saying, 'Have respect for your old age, swear by the fortune of Caesar. Repent... reproach Christ, and I will set you free.' '86 years have I have served him,' Polycarp declared, 'and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?'" Therewith the Proconsul made arrangements for him to be burned alive in the stadium. When all was made ready, Polycarp, "looked up to heaven, and said, 'O Lord God Almighty, the Father of your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ... I give You thanks that You have counted me, worthy of this day and this hour.'" "I give you thanks."

Is God good all the times? Can we really pray, "O, give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endures forever." This aged Christian thought so. He had been given much in his 86 years, and in this last moment of his life, he knew that the greatest good of all would be his in moments.

The last verse of Psalm 107 says, "*Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the LORD.*" Amen.

### Psalm 107

<sup>1</sup>Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
his love endures forever.

<sup>2</sup>Let the redeemed of the LORD say this—  
those he redeemed from the hand of the  
foe,

<sup>3</sup>those he gathered from the lands,  
from east and west, from north and south.

<sup>4</sup>Some wandered in desert wastelands,  
finding no way to a city where they could  
settle.

<sup>5</sup>They were hungry and thirsty,  
and their lives ebbed away.

<sup>6</sup>Then they cried out to the LORD in their  
trouble,  
and he delivered them from their distress.

<sup>7</sup>He led them by a straight way  
to a city where they could settle.

<sup>8</sup>Let them give thanks to the LORD for his

unfailing love

and his wonderful deeds for men,

<sup>9</sup>for he satisfies the thirsty  
and fills the hungry with good things.

<sup>10</sup>Some sat in darkness and the deepest gloom,  
prisoners suffering in iron chains,

<sup>11</sup>for they had rebelled against the words of  
God

and despised the counsel of the Most  
High.

<sup>12</sup>So he subjected them to bitter labor;  
they stumbled, and there was no one to  
help.

<sup>13</sup>Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,  
and he saved them from their distress.

<sup>14</sup>He brought them out of darkness and the  
deepest gloom  
and broke away their chains.

<sup>15</sup>Let them give thanks to the LORD for his

unfailing love  
and his wonderful deeds for men,  
<sup>16</sup>for he breaks down gates of bronze  
and cuts through bars of iron.  
<sup>17</sup>Some became fools through their rebellious  
ways  
and suffered affliction because of their  
iniquities.  
<sup>18</sup>They loathed all food  
and drew near the gates of death.  
<sup>19</sup>Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,  
and he saved them from their distress.  
<sup>20</sup>He sent forth his word and healed them;  
he rescued them from the grave.  
<sup>21</sup>Let them give thanks to the LORD for his  
unfailing love  
and his wonderful deeds for men.  
<sup>22</sup>Let them sacrifice thank offerings  
and tell of his works with songs of joy.  
<sup>23</sup>Others went out on the sea in ships;  
they were merchants on the mighty  
waters.  
<sup>24</sup>They saw the works of the LORD,  
his wonderful deeds in the deep.  
<sup>25</sup>For he spoke and stirred up a tempest  
that lifted high the waves.  
<sup>26</sup>They mounted up to the heavens & went  
down to the depths;  
in their peril their courage melted away.  
<sup>27</sup>They reeled and staggered like drunken  
men;  
they were at their wits' end.  
<sup>28</sup>Then they cried out to the LORD in their  
trouble,  
and he brought them out of their distress.  
<sup>29</sup>He stilled the storm to a whisper;  
the waves of the sea were hushed.  
<sup>30</sup>They were glad when it grew calm,  
and he guided them to their desired haven.  
<sup>31</sup>Let them give thanks to the LORD for his  
unfailing love  
and his wonderful deeds for men.  
<sup>32</sup>Let them exalt him in the assembly of the  
people  
and praise him in the council of the elders.  
<sup>33</sup>He turned rivers into a desert,  
flowing springs into thirsty ground,  
<sup>34</sup>and fruitful land into a salt waste,

because of the wickedness of those who  
lived there.  
<sup>35</sup>He turned the desert into pools of water  
and the parched ground into flowing  
springs;  
<sup>36</sup>there he brought the hungry to live,  
and they founded a city where they could  
settle.  
<sup>37</sup>They sowed fields and planted vineyards  
that yielded a fruitful harvest;  
<sup>38</sup>he blessed them, and their numbers greatly  
increased,  
and he did not let their herds diminish.  
<sup>39</sup>Then their numbers decreased, and they  
were humbled  
by oppression, calamity and sorrow;  
<sup>40</sup>he who pours contempt on nobles  
made them wander in a trackless waste.  
<sup>41</sup>But he lifted the needy out of their affliction  
and increased their families like flocks.  
<sup>42</sup>The upright see and rejoice,  
but all the wicked shut their mouths.  
<sup>43</sup>Whoever is wise, let him heed these things  
and consider the great love of the LORD.