

Sermon 071121 **"The LORD will give what is good"** Psalm 85:8-13

Over the past year and a half, we've been going through a really difficult and unprecedented time. Still, the US is doing better at vaccinating than any other country in the world. Churches that used to worship only online are now starting to offer both in-person and online worship in a hybrid way. I think more and more members of our church will come to in-person service if they are able. We have lost a lot during the pandemic, right? It is time to reflect on some of the things lost in this difficult time. Not to sigh and be discouraged, but now to move on. One thing lost is human touch: handshake and hug. The warmth conveyed by the human touch has been lost. We've also lost face to face human interactions with our family, friends, and neighbors. Of course, we do have ZOOM which is helpful to hold us together. But Zoom is no substitute for sharing the same space, the same room. Something vital is missing.

The psalm is a prayer in the midst of crisis or difficulties for the ancient faith community. The psalm 85 is placed in a post-exilic setting in which the community is struggling after the return from exile. We could think of the era of Ezra and Nehemiah and understand that the psalm looks back to ancient Israel's return from exile. It is not the same difficulty as we who went through the pandemic, but now it is time for them to move on. Especially, today's scripture delivered a message of assurance. These verses offer hope in the midst of the current trouble. We need to understand that this change begins with listening to God's Word. Verse 8 said, "Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts."

Preacher Charles Spurgeon said the following about this verse: "'I will be silent. I have spoken to him; now I will hear what his answer is. I will hold my ear attentive to listen to his voice.' O my dear hearers, when you are

willing to hear God, there are good times coming to you!”

Verses 8 and 9 characterize the word as peace and salvation for the community. God’s glory will come again to the land. In other words, God will again be present to bless the community and nurture it to fullness of life. And this gift is for the faithful, those who turn to God in their hearts. In verse 10, God’s unchanging love and trustworthiness come together to bring the community into right relationship with God and each other.

In beautiful terms it describes the salvation God brings to God’s people. It might seem that mercy and truth are set against each other, right? With mercy looking to grant pardon and truth determined to condemn. In God’s great work of salvation, mercy and truth have met together. Even as mercy and truth meet, so righteousness and peace greet each other. It might seem that righteousness would condemn me and prevent God’s peace from ever reaching me. In God’s great work of salvation, God’s righteousness and peace will kiss each other. One of the biblical commentators Clarke said, “Now, Where did righteousness and peace meet? In Christ Jesus. When were they reconciled? When he poured out his life on Calvary.”

In Lamentations 3:22-24, “Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, ‘The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.’” Here, the word compassion is translated from the Hebrew word [Chesed]. Chesed is commonly translated as “loving-kindness,” “kindness” or “love.” It is a common term in the Bible for describing God’s love for humankind and God’s special relationship with the children of Israel. But the original meaning of this word “Chesed” is ‘God walks with you’.

For example, Jacob in Genesis, after having received the blessing of the firstborn from Isaac, runs away to his uncle Laban. On the way from

Beersheba to Haran, Jacob takes a stone as pillow and lie there for the night. In his dream, he is blessed by God. When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel (the house of God)." The site of the road Jacob stayed at for one night became Bethel, the house of God. The important thing here is that where God resides, it is a holy place.

The same is true of Moses's calling. When he was climbing Mt. Horeb, God appears to him in the blazing flame, and speaks to Moses. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." I pray that God not only dwells here at Fairfield Grace, but also in the place of your daily life!

It is so precious to find the love of God, Chesed, in the place of our lives. But the life of faith does not stop at only discovering the love. We also want to respond to God's love. In Luke 9:58, "Jesus replied, 'Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.'" Having said this, Jesus tells people to follow Him. While we as humans are interested in settling in one place for stability, our Lord tells us that following Him is more important than staying in one place.

If you look at the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus, Jesus took his three disciples up to Mount Tabor. There, the three disciples see Jesus conversing with Moses and Elijah (Luke 9:33). "Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' (He did not know what he was saying.) While Peter was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came from the cloud, saying, 'This is My

Son, whom I have chosen; listen to Him!’ After the voice had spoken, only Jesus was present with them.”

The three disciples of Jesus wanted to stay in the holy place, but the Lord prayed and came down from the mountain again to the world. Then he took on the ministry of the Lord's salvation. We sometimes want to stay where we are as we are. It is a natural human reaction. However, our Lord pushes us to places that are often crowded and difficult. More precisely, He says, 'follow me' in our lives.

Fanny Crosby, America's most prolific hymn writer, wrote 8,000 Gospel songs and hymns during a lifetime, which spanned nearly a century. She passed away in her 95th year.

Tune composer Phoebe Palmer Knapp (1839-1908) played a melody to Fanny Crosby and asked, "What does the melody say to you?" Crosby replied that the tune said, "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!" and proceeded to recite the entire first stanza of the now-famous hymn. Fanny Crosby (1820-1915), blind at the age of six weeks, was a lifelong Methodist who began composing hymns at age six. She became a student at the New York Institute of the Blind at age 15 and joined the faculty of the Institute at 22, teaching rhetoric and history.

Crosby's hymns have historically been among the most popular songs sung by Methodists. "Blessed Assurance" (1873) is one of the ten most popular hymns sung by United Methodists, and it is one of eight Crosby hymns in The United Methodist Hymnal.

“Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!  
O what a foretaste of glory divine!  
Heir of salvation, purchase of God.

Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

Chorus:

This is my story, this is my song,  
Praising my Savior, all the day long,  
This is my story, this is my song,  
Praising my Savior, all the day long."

(<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-blessed-assurance>)

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Jesus Christ, church is the place where the Lord calls us. Here we worship and praise the Lord. We listen to the words of God in order to be faithful to God. The Lord also said that the church is a house of prayer for all people. We are now here to worship God and go forth to the place of life that God has entrusted to us. Maybe that's a place of wilderness. But first, please remember the love of God, Chesed! Please remember the words of Jesus, "Follow me!" We do not live a life of faith only with our heads, but with our hearts and our actions. I bless you in the name of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ that you prioritize your time with the Lord and be continually enriched by the spring water of eternal life, so that you become channels of eternal life to those around you. Amen!