

St. Paul's Lutheran Church Muskego, WI

“Rest for the Stressed” – September 1,2,5 2018

Psalm 73

GOD'S LOVE IS BIG ENOUGH FOR CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS

Is the commitment in your marriage big enough to survive the “crucial conversations” vital to a healthy relationship? Is your “best friend friendship” REAL enough for the “crucial conversations” that separate most friends?

Crucial is an interesting word. “Vital”, “critical”. Its root is Latin: *crux*. Cross. When a REALITY meets a RESPONSE, you have a *crucial* event. The best example of a “crucial conversation”? The cross of Jesus Christ. The Creator speaks to his world:

“Your sin is a serious deal--hurting, wounding, killing. I must be just and punish it or you will only seek to take. People cry out to me for justice! I established this world for you and I gave you my heart. I modeled love as service. But in selfishness you cast aside my love and my heart and shattered our friendship--a relationship KEY to your happiness and to a functional world.

“To make things right and to force conversation, I sent my Son. I stretched him out on the cross for you where your sin met my justice! He absorbed the world's rejection of me and suffered. He died to pay for your sin. To believe in him as your Savior IS forgiveness and I will welcome you into the family of God—where crucial conversations happen all the time. My love is big enough for crucial conversations.”

Asaph trusted that...so he voiced one putting pen to paper that WE would be blessed! His crucial conversation with the Almighty is called *Psalm 73*, and curiously, Asaph does all the talking! What a comfort when we think of our conversations with God in the dark of the night and in the midst of trouble? God's love is big enough for ALL of our words...even that running monologue in our heads! You know, that inner voice that carries on its own conversation: “Wow, I hope his sermon keeps me awake today. I am *tired!*” “Man, I hope my sermon grabs them this morning. I'm feeling tired!” THAT voice?

Do you ever, have we ever, directed that inner voice AT God? “God, church can be a bit of a challenge! Sometimes I am tired, but there are times when what you say just hits a nerve—too close to home! Just sayin'.” OR do you tend to keep that inner voice to yourself forgetting that God hears?

Asaph? He is bold! He is gutsy! He just lays it out his thoughts for a crucial conversation with the Almighty!

1. “God Is Good to His People...”

Have you ever planted a tree, preparing the soil, digging the hole, setting roots—but something's not right? You feel the urge to prune—it has three trunks! NOT good. But you can't trim too much because leaves=food=root growth. So, for long term health you remove a trunk; short term health you remove broken branches. For a tree, pruning is a necessary and healthy!

Same with people! Listen to Jesus in John 15: ***“I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he trims clean so that it will be even more fruitful.”***

Pruning is necessary and healthy so Asaph begins with a proclamation: ***“Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.”***

Asaph reminds us to applaud the work of our God that ***“in ALL things he is at work for the good of his people.”*** Yes! Thank you, God, for your loving pruning in life that trains our eyes to be fixed on you and on heaven! We love it that you work that way! No pain, no gain! We get it!

Until we don’t! In ALL things?!! I don’t “get” a miscarriage in MY life. I don’t understand the financial struggles of MY life. I don’t understand this diagnosis at THIS stage in my life. And some days I just don’t understand my life. I never saw this coming!

Forgive me, Lord! Help me to trust that you are the Master Pruner—at work for good. You must cut some, but never too much... After all, the roots need to grow...to be strengthened.

APPLICATION Karen attends *Following the Promise* class on Tuesdays. I have permission to share her story. “Routine” heart valve surgery. Home in 9 days. Unexpected complications. 911. Shocking her heart. Back to the hospital. Breathing tube in...out...in! Pacemaker permanently on board. Devotions in the hospital—some remembered, some not. Finally, a home visit on August 22. The theme for our devotion on Revelation 1? ***“Karen, you are a princess of the King!”***

There was great IRONY that day as Karen sat in her recliner, a shadow of her normal self! Long pants, a sweater, her legs covered in a blanket--the Almighty God called her his daughter, his princess! The Apostle John writes as much: ***“I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus...”*** Do you see the irony? Children of the Kingdom of God...in suffering and endurance this side of heaven!

The JOY of that day as I sat with Karen? Karen would NOT disagree with Asaph! ***“Surely God is good to Israel!”*** Karen would tell you that as a princess of the King, she is honored to see his face when that is his will, yet she will marshal the strength to serve him here as it is his will. You see, at the cross there was a crucial conversation between Karen and her God, and Karen believes that the God of grace is good to his people!

2. “Yet, Sometimes I Envy the Wicked...”

But now we come to Asaph’s inner voice and his trust that **GOD’S LOVE IS BIG ENOUGH FOR CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS!**

“But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from common human burdens; they are not plagued by human ills. This is what the wicked are like—always free of care, they go on amassing wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure.”

What is God teaching us through the voice of Asaph? The temptation is *there* for US to “buy the lie” of earthly treasure! Our FAITH says, “Thank you, Lord, that Asaph has voiced the thoughts that are sometimes in my head: ‘Is faith in Jesus worth turning away from temptation and putting off the pleasures of this world unless God says the time and manner is right?’”

With Asaph we must confess that we are guilty: *“As for me, my feet had almost slipped; I nearly lost my foothold! I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Does the Most High have knowledge of these things?”*

And with Asaph we ask that God would help us to trust our eyes of faith rather than to indulge our physical eyes of flesh!

APPLICATION In truth, however, the temptation to speak with Asaph about the wicked is pretty tough at times! Think of actors and actresses who rake in the millions but who espouse political and social platforms that are offensive to God! Do we ever wonder why God lets them prosper? How is that fair?

Think of professional athletes who haul in millions yet violate the law, beat the justice system, and receive the accolades of fans still! Do we look to heaven and cry, “Foul!”, but God doesn’t seem to hear? Think of career criminals with money to beat the rap! We could move on to politics but that would seem too easy!

The caution flag goes up here, friends! I must share one commentator’s observation on this psalm: **“Envy is a corrosive acid that eats away at contentment and faith. It seems that the main thing that was angering Asaph was not indignation that the wicked were dishonoring God but resentment that the wicked seemed to have more than he. His frustration was more self-pity than zeal for God’s honor.”**

How true it is that the most crucial conversations are actually had around the cross of Christ where OUR sin is acknowledged, our sin is FORGIVEN and our worldview is adjusted for heavenly goals and heavenly treasures. Lord Jesus, may WE be all about souls and saving them and less concerned about the things of this world.

3. “...Until I Hang Out With My God.”

God is good to his people...yet sometimes I envy the wicked...UNTIL I HANG OUT WITH MY GOD.

The apostle Paul once wrote, *“Do not be misled. Bad company corrupts good character.”* Asaph agreed with Paul! *“When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.”*

What do we learn from our God? Two things: 1) *Choose your friends wisely because you will become them.* Asaph discovered that it was blessing to hang out with his God, the God who designed us and who planned our salvation!

2) With Asaph we learn that *the wicked only have “comforts” and pleasures for THIS life*, and that to dishonor God and to shout down his truth and to pull people into your game is a dead end—hurting people and bringing the wrath of God! It is on us to understand the true “end” of the wicked and to pray for strength to focus on heavenly treasures.

Thank you, Lord, that you regularly work to adjust the lenses of our worldview. We confess that the world and its pleasures pull at us—sometimes in an instant, and with some sins, always. We pray dangerously, LORD: “Do whatever is required in my life to keep me close to you, to drive me into YOUR voice, your Word--to keep my awareness and my focus *eternal*. Whatever it takes, LORD!”

APPLICATION The story is told of a pastor in this area 50 years ago--a man who understood God’s grace and his mercy and his love! One day the pastor was privileged to attend the funeral of a young man who had died in faith and in Jesus. The pastor was assisting the family in doing

what Christians do. We enter the sanctuary and we hang out for a time with our God. ***Crucial conversations at the foot of the cross.***

The challenge that day for God's people? What ***exactly*** to say to the mother of that young man for this was her third and final son! The pastor came and sat with the mother, placed his hand on hers, and said a very surprising thing with a smile on his face: "God must love you very much."

Do WE see what that pastor saw? Do WE see what Asaph saw? No matter the journey of God's people—no matter how long or short, no matter how easy or hard—when we hang out with our God, we will KNOW that our God is always at work! Three sons were safely home just as God had promised in the waters of holy baptism! A mother was firmly focused on the great reunion in heaven Jesus had promised! The "world" would look and pity a woman who believed in a God "too weak" to prevent the death. The woman looked, and in time, saw a world without hope that needed her sharp vision of the joys of heaven. She became very good at telling of God's amazing, forgiving love!

What a blessing to talk things through at the foot of the cross!

CONCLUSION Dear friends, are there issues, challenges temptations that keep your heart from finding God's rest? Have you had heart-to-hearts at the foot of the cross to ***hear*** the voice of God and to ***be soothed*** in the depths of your soul? Let us part today with the encouragement of Asaph: "***But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of your deeds.***" Amen.

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