

150 Days in the Psalms

*“Sing aloud to God our strength;
shout for joy to the God of Jacob!” Psalm 81:1*

Over the past several weeks, we’ve become quite familiar with Psalms of praise, of prayer, of contrition, and even of justice. But less familiar are the Psalms of history. While the entire Psalter has a historical basis, often in the life and times of David, there are a few Psalms which speak directly of a historical event or a series of events.

Such is the case this week with Psalms 78 and 81. In Bible times, literacy was rare. You couldn’t crack open a history text or login to Wikipedia to learn about your past. Instead, you’d hear stories, told over and over again, so that you could learn your own story, and the story of your people. You may not know every name and every date, as historians are expected to know now, but you’d become intimately familiar with the intense emotions surrounding your people’s story.

And, of course, what better way to learn your history than with a musical accompaniment. Music aids in learning. It aids in memory. It should not surprise us that we find the history of the people of Israel set to music. And this was no whitewashed history. Here, laid bare, is the unvarnished history of God’s people, warts and all.

As Christians, we all have stories to tell. Our own story, certainly, but also the stories of our congregations and families; of missionaries and martyrs; of triumphs and tragedies, and the faith and hope that keeps us grounded in the midst of both. As you think about telling your own *history*, consider the emotion and the drama presented in this week’s Psalms. Let it inform how you tell your own history. It doesn’t have to be set to music, certainly, but Scripture demonstrates to us that the telling of our history is important, and is an engaging treasure that has endured for aeons. We all have stories. Take a page from the Psalms, and be bold to tell yours.

*-Rev. Matthew Schettler
Resurrection Lutheran Church, Chicago, IL*

Psalm 78

Monday



The 78th Psalm is a Psalm of instruction. Using the example and history of the entire people of Israel from the beginning until David, it teaches us to trust and to believe in God and it warns us against mistrust and faithlessness. It declares the punishment which follows faithlessness and the grace that comes with trust. As it is read, the reader is invited to subsume himself in the story of God's zealous presence among His people.

1 Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;
incline your ears to the words of my mouth!

2 I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings from of old,

3 things that we have heard and known,
that our fathers have told us.

4 We will not hide them from their children,
but tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might,
and the wonders that he has done.

5 He established a testimony in Jacob
and appointed a law in Israel,
which he commanded our fathers
to teach to their children,

6 that the next generation might know them,
the children yet unborn,
and arise and tell them to their children,

7 so that they should set their hope in God
and not forget the works of God,
but keep his commandments;

8 and that they should not be like their fathers,
a stubborn and rebellious generation,
a generation whose heart was not steadfast,
whose spirit was not faithful to God.

9 The Ephraimites, armed with the bow,

turned back on the day of battle.

10 They did not keep God's covenant,
but refused to walk according to his law.

11 They forgot his works
and the wonders that he had shown them.

12 In the sight of their fathers he performed wonders
in the land of Egypt, in the fields of Zoan.

13 He divided the sea and let them pass through it,
and made the waters stand like a heap.

14 In the daytime he led them with a cloud,
and all the night with a fiery light.

15 He split rocks in the wilderness
and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep.

16 He made streams come out of the rock
and caused waters to flow down like rivers.

17 Yet they sinned still more against him,
rebellious against the Most High in the desert.

18 They tested God in their heart
by demanding the food they craved.

19 They spoke against God, saying,
“Can God spread a table in the wilderness?

20 He struck the rock so that water gushed out
and streams overflowed.

Can he also give bread
or provide meat for his people?”

21 Therefore, when the Lord heard, he was full of wrath;
a fire was kindled against Jacob;

his anger rose against Israel,

22 because they did not believe in God
and did not trust his saving power.

23 Yet he commanded the skies above
and opened the doors of heaven,

24 and he rained down on them manna to eat
and gave them the grain of heaven.

25 Man ate of the bread of the angels;
he sent them food in abundance.

26 He caused the east wind to blow in the heavens,

and by his power he led out the south wind;
27 he rained meat on them like dust,
winged birds like the sand of the seas;
28 he let them fall in the midst of their camp,
all around their dwellings.
29 And they ate and were well filled,
for he gave them what they craved.
30 But before they had satisfied their craving,
while the food was still in their mouths,
31 the anger of God rose against them,
and he killed the strongest of them
and laid low the young men of Israel.

32 In spite of all this, they still sinned;
despite his wonders, they did not believe.
33 So he made their days vanish like a breath,
and their years in terror.
34 When he killed them, they sought him;
they repented and sought God earnestly.
35 They remembered that God was their rock,
the Most High God their redeemer.
36 But they flattered him with their mouths;
they lied to him with their tongues.
37 Their heart was not steadfast toward him;
they were not faithful to his covenant.
38 Yet he, being compassionate,
atoned for their iniquity
and did not destroy them;
he restrained his anger often
and did not stir up all his wrath.
39 He remembered that they were but flesh,
a wind that passes and comes not again.
40 How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness
and grieved him in the desert!
41 They tested God again and again
and provoked the Holy One of Israel.
42 They did not remember his power
or the day when he redeemed them from the foe,
43 when he performed his signs in Egypt

and his marvels in the fields of Zoan.
44 He turned their rivers to blood,
so that they could not drink of their streams.
45 He sent among them swarms of flies, which devoured them,
and frogs, which destroyed them.
46 He gave their crops to the destroying locust
and the fruit of their labor to the locust.
47 He destroyed their vines with hail
and their sycamores with frost.
48 He gave over their cattle to the hail
and their flocks to thunderbolts.
49 He let loose on them his burning anger,
wrath, indignation, and distress,
a company of destroying angels.
50 He made a path for his anger;
he did not spare them from death,
but gave their lives over to the plague.
51 He struck down every firstborn in Egypt,
the firstfruits of their strength in the tents of Ham.
52 Then he led out his people like sheep
and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.
53 He led them in safety, so that they were not afraid,
but the sea overwhelmed their enemies.
54 And he brought them to his holy land,
to the mountain which his right hand had won.
55 He drove out nations before them;
he apportioned them for a possession
and settled the tribes of Israel in their tents.

56 Yet they tested and rebelled against the Most High God
and did not keep his testimonies,
57 but turned away and acted treacherously like their fathers;
they twisted like a deceitful bow.
58 For they provoked him to anger with their high places;
they moved him to jealousy with their idols.
59 When God heard, he was full of wrath,
and he utterly rejected Israel.
60 He forsook his dwelling at Shiloh,
the tent where he dwelt among mankind,

61 and delivered his power to captivity,
his glory to the hand of the foe.
62 He gave his people over to the sword
and vented his wrath on his heritage.
63 Fire devoured their young men,
and their young women had no marriage song.
64 Their priests fell by the sword,
and their widows made no lamentation.
65 Then the Lord awoke as from sleep,
like a strong man shouting because of wine.
66 And he put his adversaries to rout;
he put them to everlasting shame.

67 He rejected the tent of Joseph;
he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim,
68 but he chose the tribe of Judah,
Mount Zion, which he loves.
69 He built his sanctuary like the high heavens,
like the earth, which he has founded forever.
70 He chose David his servant
and took him from the sheepfolds;
71 from following the nursing ewes he brought him
to shepherd Jacob his people,
Israel his inheritance.
72 With upright heart he shepherded them
and guided them with his skillful hand.

Prayer

God of Our Fathers; of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who led Your people through the wilderness and sustained them there, be pleased to do to us as You did to them: lead us through the desert of this world with the light of Your Holy Spirit. Give us of the bread that came down from heaven, the flesh of Your dear Son to eat that we, being purified by his blood, our hearts may be set aright, and our spirits may cleave stedfastly to You. May we, like the wandering Israelites, be conducted by Your mercy to Your sanctuary, and to the mountain where You reign over all the creatures now and forever

Psalm 79

Tuesday



The 79th Psalm is a Psalm of prayer against the destruction to come, which was accomplished by the Chaldeans and by Antiochus Epiphanus. Isaiah 63 also prays concerning this coming destruction. It serves to remind us that, although we may find ourselves under God's judgement, we may look to him for mercy.

1 O God, the nations have come into your inheritance;
they have defiled your holy temple;
they have laid Jerusalem in ruins.

2 They have given the bodies of your servants
to the birds of the heavens for food,
the flesh of your faithful to the beasts of the earth.

3 They have poured out their blood like water
all around Jerusalem,
and there was no one to bury them.

4 We have become a taunt to our neighbors,
mocked and derided by those around us.

5 How long, O Lord? Will you be angry forever?
Will your jealousy burn like fire?

6 Pour out your anger on the nations
that do not know you,
and on the kingdoms
that do not call upon your name!

7 For they have devoured Jacob
and laid waste his habitation.

8 Do not remember against us our former iniquities;
let your compassion come speedily to meet us,
for we are brought very low.

9 Help us, O God of our salvation,
for the glory of your name;
deliver us, and atone for our sins,
for your name's sake!

10 Why should the nations say,

“Where is their God?”

Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of your servants
be known among the nations before our eyes!

11 Let the groans of the prisoners come before you;
according to your great power, preserve those doomed to die!

12 Return sevenfold into the lap of our neighbors
the taunts with which they have taunted you, O Lord!

13 But we your people, the sheep of your pasture,
will give thanks to you forever;
from generation to generation we will recount your praise.

Prayer

O Lord, You have planted Your Church in the humility, poverty and death of Your Son, watered it with the blood of the Apostles and Martyrs, and have made it flourish and spread forth its branches by the warmth and heat and graces of Your Holy Spirit, and has, according to Your promise, still preserved it in the midst of all challenges. Let us continue to enjoy the freedom of Your Gospel, the food of Your Word, the sweet refreshings of Your Sacraments, and all the benefits of the society of Saints. Make us to be Your people, and the sheep of Your pasture; secure and glad in Your salvation.

Psalm 80

Wednesday



The 80th Psalm is a psalm of prayer against the constant enemies; the neighboring peoples: the Philistines, Syrians, Moabites and Edomites, among others. They surrounded the people of Israel, pestering and attacking them. So also we pray against our enemies and neighbors, the factious spirits and the spiritual “fathers” and orders, and have prayed in times past against the heretics of the Church.

1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock.
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.

2 Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh,
stir up your might
and come to save us!

3 Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be saved!

4 O Lord God of hosts,
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?

5 You have fed them with the bread of tears
and given them tears to drink in full measure.

6 You make us an object of contention for our neighbors,
and our enemies laugh among themselves.

7 Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved!

8 You brought a vine out of Egypt;
you drove out the nations and planted it.

9 You cleared the ground for it;
it took deep root and filled the land.

10 The mountains were covered with its shade,
the mighty cedars with its branches.

11 It sent out its branches to the sea
and its shoots to the River.

12 Why then have you broken down its walls,
so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?

13 The boar from the forest ravages it,
and all that move in the field feed on it.

14 Turn again, O God of hosts!
Look down from heaven, and see;
have regard for this vine,

15 the stock that your right hand planted,
and for the son whom you made strong for yourself.

16 They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down;
may they perish at the rebuke of your face!

17 But let your hand be on the man of your right hand,
the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself!

18 Then we shall not turn back from you;
give us life, and we will call upon your name!

19 Restore us, O Lord God of hosts!
Let your face shine, that we may be saved!

Prayer

O Good Shepherd of Israel, stirre up Your strength and come and help Your people, who pray to You for mercy and protection. Let not Your Church become a strife to her neighbours, but reunite her divisions and make her not a prey to those who would devour her. O Lord, plant a hedge around with Your mercies, lest the wild beasts of the field do her harm. Rather, let her so flourish under the beams of Your favour and providence, that it may take root and spread and fill all lands, that the name of the man of Your right hand, the God and Man Christ Jesus may be glorified, Your Church enlarged and defended, and we blessed with Your salvation. Grant this O Lord for the sake of Jesus Christ, our only Savior and Redeemer.

Psalm 81

Thursday



The 81st Psalm is a psalm of prayer and a song which was sung and preached in the harvest season at the festival of tabernacles, so that the people would be recalled to the First Commandment, that they should have only one God – He who had brought them out of the land of Egypt – and should praise and call on no other. But they did not keep this command, but instead their mouth and instruction were full of idolotry, whereas their mouth should have been full of the true God and should have always spoken of Him alone, and never commend any work as righteous before God. We also should have our mouth full of Christ, yet we also do not always do this. Lord, have mercy upon us!

1 Sing aloud to God our strength;

shout for joy to the God of Jacob!

2 Raise a song; sound the tambourine,

the sweet lyre with the harp.

3 Blow the trumpet at the new moon,

at the full moon, on our feast day.

4 For it is a statute for Israel,

a rule of the God of Jacob.

5 He made it a decree in Joseph

when he went out over the land of Egypt.

I hear a language I had not known:

6 “I relieved your shoulder of the burden;

your hands were freed from the basket.

7 In distress you called, and I delivered you;

I answered you in the secret place of thunder;

I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Selah

8 Hear, O my people, while I admonish you!

O Israel, if you would but listen to me!

9 There shall be no strange god among you;

you shall not bow down to a foreign god.

10 I am the Lord your God,

who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

11 “But my people did not listen to my voice;
Israel would not submit to me.

12 So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts,
to follow their own counsels.

13 Oh, that my people would listen to me,
that Israel would walk in my ways!

14 I would soon subdue their enemies
and turn my hand against their foes.

15 Those who hate the Lord would cringe toward him,
and their fate would last forever.

16 But he would feed you with the finest of the wheat,
and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.”

Prayer

O Lord God, whose mercies are infinite, whose Majesty is glorious, whose goodness is amiable above all the excellencies in the World, enlarge our hearts with joy and, rejoicing in Your glories, open our mouths wide and fill our lips with thy praises. Give us good words that we may, in the best manner, expresse our thankfulnes to You, and give us Your grace, that we may heare Your voice and obey You. Being delivered from the burden of our sin, feed us with the choicest of thy mercies, and with food from the Rock, Christ Jesus, even his most precious body and bloud, nourishing us up to life eternal, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

Psalm 82

Friday



The 82nd Psalm is a Psalm of comfort against the tyrants who oppress those in misery. It gives us hope that, even as we endure the wicked rulers of our present age, that God's will and justice will be done, for He is the inheritor of all nations.

- 1 God has taken his place in the divine council;
in the midst of the gods he holds judgment:
- 2 “How long will you judge unjustly
and show partiality to the wicked? *Selah*
- 3 Give justice to the weak and the fatherless;
maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.
- 4 Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”

- 5 They have neither knowledge nor understanding,
they walk about in darkness;
all the foundations of the earth are shaken.

- 6 I said, “You are gods,
sons of the Most High, all of you;
- 7 nevertheless, like men you shall die,
and fall like any prince.”
- 8 Arise, O God, judge the earth;
for you shall inherit all the nations!

Prayer

O Almighty God, Judge of men and angels, let Your Spirit rest upon Your Church, and let thy righteousness and judgements guide all those who sit in the seat of earthly judgment, that they may enact justice to the people by defending and promoting the interests of the faithful, relieving the oppressed, encouraging virtue, and delivering the poor, that we may all live before You in righteousness and expectation of the final judgement, where we eagerly await, in faith, Your mercies, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Psalm 83

Saturday



The 83rd Psalm is a Psalm of prayer. It serves much the same function as Psalm 80, in that it also clearly spells out the names of the Gentile nations, the threat they have made against Israel, and the hope of salvation for all God's people.

- 1 O God, do not keep silence;
do not hold your peace or be still, O God!
- 2 For behold, your enemies make an uproar;
those who hate you have raised their heads.
- 3 They lay crafty plans against your people;
they consult together against your treasured ones.
- 4 They say, "Come, let us wipe them out as a nation;
let the name of Israel be remembered no more!"
- 5 For they conspire with one accord;
against you they make a covenant—
- 6 the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites,
Moab and the Hagrites,
- 7 Gebal and Ammon and Amalek,
Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre;
- 8 Asshur also has joined them;
they are the strong arm of the children of Lot. *Selah*

- 9 Do to them as you did to Midian,
as to Sisera and Jabin at the river Kishon,
- 10 who were destroyed at En-dor,
who became dung for the ground.
- 11 Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb,
all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna,
- 12 who said, "Let us take possession for ourselves
of the pastures of God."

- 13 O my God, make them like whirling dust,
like chaff before the wind.
- 14 As fire consumes the forest,
as the flame sets the mountains ablaze,

15 so may you pursue them with your tempest
and terrify them with your hurricane!
16 Fill their faces with shame,
that they may seek your name, O Lord.
17 Let them be put to shame and dismayed forever;
let them perish in disgrace,
18 that they may know that you alone,
whose name is the Lord,
are the Most High over all the earth.

Prayer

O Lord God, known to Thy people Israel by thy name Yahweh, You are the highest over all the earth. Arise and defend Your people, and deliver them from the murmurings, councils, and crafty imaginations of our enemies. Fix the foundations of the Church upon the Rock, and preserve our inheritance in peace and safety. Restrain the sacrilegious appetites of all such persons who would rob all Your houses. Transform their hearts, that they may turn from impiety and seek Your Name, repenting of all their sin and living in justice, that, at the last, they may come into an everlasting possession of Your house and of Your Temple where Your Honor dwells and reigns eternally, world without end.

Psalm 84

Sunday



The 84th Psalm is a Psalm of comfort. It praises God's Word highly over all things and exhorts us to gladly give up all good things – glory, power, joy, and whatever we desire – that we may hold onto God's Word. And should we be like the doorkeeper, that is, the least of those in the temple, this would still be far better than to sit in all the castles of the godless. For God's Word gives victory, salvation, grace, glory, and all good things. Oh, how blessed are those who believe this and keep it! But where are they? Even if one were slandered and despised, there he would find the whole world to be full and prepared for him.

- 1 How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord of hosts!
- 2 My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God.
- 3 Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O Lord of hosts,
my King and my God.
- 4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise! Selah
- 5 Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.
- 6 As they go through the Valley of Baca
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.
- 7 They go from strength to strength;
each one appears before God in Zion.
- 8 O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah

9 Behold our shield, O God;
look on the face of your anointed!

10 For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

11 For the Lord God is a sun and shield;
the Lord bestows favor and honor.

No good thing does he withhold
from those who walk uprightly.

12 O Lord of hosts,
blessed is the one who trusts in you!

Prayer

O Lord God of hosts, who dwells in the heavens, seated in essential and eternal felicities; fill our hearts with desires and longings to enter into your dwelling places here on earth. And that our desires may receive infinite satisfactions, give us Your help, that, even as we go through the vale of misery, our cups may overflow, that we, living a godly life, going from strength to strength, from virtue to virtue, at the last may appear in Zion, to the God of Gods, beholding the face of Your anointed, Your Christ, and our Jesus, and may dwell eternally in Your presence, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.