6-21-20, The Holy Way

Sermon on Psalm 86:1—10, 16 & 17

1. Introduction
2. The Psalms
3. Collected and edited into five books, possibly to represent the five books of the Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy
4. Used extensively in Temple worship
5. Express a large range of emotions and emotional states, from peace (Psalm 23) to despair (Psalm 137) to praise (Psalm 150).
6. This Psalm is a psalm of individual lament.
7. Prayer
8. The text
9. (v. pre-one) A prayer of David [This can mean “by David”, “about David”, “in the style of David”, “for David”, etc. This is the only Psalm in Book 3 to contain this reference to David.]
10. (v. 1—7) **A plea for God to hear**
11. (v. 1) Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.
12. (v. 2a) Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you; save your servant who trusts you [This is another of those couplets we’ve talked about.]
13. (v. 2b & 3) You are my God; be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I cry all day long.
14. (v.4 & 5)
15. (v. 4) Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
16. (v. 5) For you, Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love (*hesed*) to all who call on you.
17. (v. 6) Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; listen to my cry of supplication.
18. (v. 7) In the day of my trouble I call on you, for you will answer me.
19. (v. 8—10) **What God is like**
20. (v. 8) There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours.
21. (v. 9) All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O lord.
22. (v. 10) For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God
23. The intervening verses ask God to teach us the truth and to unite our hearts with God. We promise that we will give heartfelt thanks, because God’s *hesed* is great and God has delivered us from eternal death. The verses go on to talk about arrogant and violent men who are threatening the Psalmist’s live. Then we come to the beautiful verse 15, which says, “But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in *hesed* and faithfulness.”
24. (v. 16 & 17) **Another plea to God**
25. (v. 16a) Turn to me and be gracious to me
26. (v. 16b) Give your strength to your servant
27. (v. 16c) save the child of your serving girl [This may reflect the idea of truly belonging to the household of God. Some have suggested that there was a difference in relationship with servants/slaves who were born into the household, as opposed to those who were purchased and brought into the household.]
28. (v. 17)
29. Show me a sign of your favor
30. So that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame [For the Psalmist, the fact of the sign is more important than the nature of it.]
31. Because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.
32. What do we say in response to this Psalm?

I think it’s fair to say that most of us aren’t really good at lament. Now, that doesn’t mean that we don’t complain. Lots of us do that, and I include myself in that group. But we’re not good at crying out to God from the core of our being, acknowledging that we can’t make things better, and begging God to be with us and help us. That’s what lament is. And I believe that today, this morning, lament is the thing we need most. This is my lament, and I hope it speaks for you as well.

Incline your ear to us, Lord and please answer us, for we need you to guide and lead us in this moment. We are at a loss as to what we should say and do at this moment. Life feels like a whirlpool of emotions, needs, and concerns.

Preserve us as your church, Lord. We are seeking to be devoted to you and to show our devotion to you. But there are so many competing demands on us, and so many voices in our ears crying for our attention. Help us to hear your voice more clearly, and to do the work you are laying before us.

You are our God; help us to see your grace in our lives. And not only may we see your grace and your shalom, God. May we show your love, your grace, your shalom in all we do and say, and may we be your instruments, imperfect as we are, of healing in the world.

Fill your church with hope and joy, Lord, not just for ourselves but for all people. We lift ourselves, our hopes, our lives up to you. You, God, are filled with love and abounding in grace, and you have made us your people, your community in the world.

God, we don’t need to wait for the day of our trouble; that day is here. People are dying from Covid-19. Cases in this county are still increasing. Our sisters and brothers who are African American, Latino, and Native American are becoming ill and dying in greater numbers than the rest of us.

We also know more and more the systems that work to the disadvantage of people of color and to the advantage of the rest of us. In education, in housing, in lending, in employment, and in the criminal justice system, these systems push some of our human family down while lifting others of us up.

Lord God, we are haunted by the image of George Floyd on the ground, a policer’s knee on his neck as his life drains away. And God, we know that these things happen too frequently. We honor and ask your protection on those officers who do their work with integrity, but we ask that you will lead us to find our voices in support of reform for police policies and practices.

There is none like you, O Lord. You have created all that there is. You have brought beauty into every part of the earth, including our own desert. You have brought the glory of cactus blooms, soaring Harris hawks, and the sweet smell of rain to us. You are good, and your love lasts forever.

Turn to us, God, and be gracious. Give us your strength, your courage, your stamina, to be your voice in the world. God, lead each of us into prayer, deep and meaningful prayer, that we may know clearly what you are laying before us as our own mission in your own name.

My sisters and brothers, may we continue to cry out to God for wisdom, for courage, and for strength. May it be so. Amen