

How Steadfast is God's Love!

[Psalm 107:1-9, 107:43](#)

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Sunday, August 5, 2007

Worship at 9:15 and 11 a.m.

Something that I have really noticed in this past year is that NPC is a praying church. Now presumably we should be able to say that about any Christian gathering, but truth is prayer is more at the center of some congregations' lives than others. And I have noticed that prayer is definitely at the center of this church's life.

Perhaps like some of you, I lean heavily on the prayers found in Scripture, such as the Lord's Prayer (the topic of the sermon last week), to guide me in my own time with God. I also lean heavily, like many of you do, on the Psalms in time of prayer.

I do not entirely understand the Psalms. They speak of realities that run deeper than my own ability to comprehend. But that is part of why I love them. Like good art, I know what I like, and I know what works. And I have just learned over time that reading the Psalms out loud, or even out loud in my own head, feels like prayer to me and takes me time and time again into God's presence.

I know it is prayer because when I read the words of the Psalms out loud, I have this intuitive sense that God is listening. And without question, those words also speak back to me about God's plan and God's intention for us.

And in those moments of prayer through the Psalms, I sense that I am entering another reality. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say God's light is cast on the daily realities of my own life and the life of our community of faith.

And at the center of the Psalms' power is the earthly, and indeed earth-y, language that they contain. If the language was more abstract, less tainted by the mundane and sometimes harsh realities of human life and human striving, it would not be relevant at all. These words would just be sayings and platitudes, easily dismissed.

But the words of Psalm 107 are not easily dismissed. They speak the truth— to our struggles, to our hopes, to our longing for God's answer and deliverance.

Let us now prayerfully turn our attention to Psalm 107, beginning at the first verse.

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those he redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to an inhabited town; hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; he led them by a straight way, until they reached an inhabited town. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. For he satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things.

Let those who are wise give heed to these things, and consider the steadfast love of the Lord.

Let us pray: Lord, teach us to pray through the words of your Holy Scripture. Through words that pass our lips, and the deepest meditations of our hearts and minds, speak to us your constant message of assurance and hope, we pray. Indeed, your steadfast love endures forever. We know that through our faith in Jesus. Amen.

“O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever.”

For some gathered here today those are new words. For some they are more than familiar. All of us need to say them out loud again and again until they sink in. And then, one more time for good measure.

Hesed is the Hebrew expression for God's "steadfast love." It refers specifically to the reliable help or deliverance the Lord provides to those who acknowledge their dependence on him. Perhaps you noticed there are a lot of concepts packed into that definition:

First, God is reliable. God seeks to help and deliver us from trouble. God provides what is needed. And he does so for those who do not hesitate to recognize out loud that they are not smart enough, or talented enough, or powerful enough to get themselves out of the mess they find themselves in. In fact, biblical scholars are quick to point out that *hesed* (God's steadfast love) comes especially into play when there is no possible outcome other than disaster. God is not just one of the options for a redemptive outcome, God is the only option.

So Psalm 107 is not just a romantic poem or meditation on the beauty of love, felt with sentiment in human hearts. Even more, it is an expression of the kind of love rooted in God's will to save and redeem his people.

God's *hesed* (his steadfast love) is the kind of love experienced by those who have felt the world come out from under their feet and have also experienced deliverance through such a time. Psalm 107 is not bedtime reading, intended to lull you into a sense of calm repose. No, Psalm 107 is for reading out loud in the oppressive glare of a midday sun. When you are really feeling the heat and just need help — and you need it now!

Perhaps each of us here has experienced such a time. I do believe that there are people in this world who go through life without too many troubles, but I think most of us can recall a time, or perhaps you are in the middle of such a time right now, when you do not know which way is up and which way is down.

You just know that you are trying everything that you can. You have sought forgiveness for the wrong you have done, but it is not given. You have extended forgiveness to someone who is lost in shame, but they cannot receive it, and it breaks your heart.

What you thought was permanent and sure in your life has been taken away, and you did not see it coming. The deepest longing of your heart remains unfulfilled. Your fellowship has come to division, and you long for unity among your brothers and sisters.

You need help from above. You need an answer and direction, which you cannot devise by your own internal compass.

If this is you, then you can identify with the Psalmist when he writes in verse 4, "Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to an inhabited town; hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them."

But "Then," verse 6, "they cried to the Lord in their trouble..."

"He delivered them from their distress; he led them by a straight way, until they reached an inhabited town. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love...for he satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things."

Key to me in those verses about God's deliverance is that it comes by God's hand, not our own. God leads us in his straight path, not a path of our own discovery.

You know, God specializes in stopping along the paths of life to pick up travelers who have gone their own way. He finds them in the ditches—beaten down and exploited by the devil—and takes them to the inn, and tells the innkeeper, "Give this traveler food to eat, mend his wounds." "Give her rest." "I've got it covered. This is on me."

“This is on me.” Is that not the word of God to us? That God’s love is constant, unfailing, through faith in Jesus Christ? The resolution, the balm, the healing comes in the form of a gift? The price is already paid for those who will acknowledge him?

Even if we’ve turned from his love in the past, when we finally come around, God is ready to give again. His love is constant, steadfast, sure.

If you have your Bible in hand you will see later in the Psalm, verse 11, “Some sat in darkness and in gloom, prisoners in misery and in irons, for they had rebelled against the word of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High”...but later (verse 13)... “they cried to the Lord in their trouble...” and then (verse 14)... “he brought them out of darkness and gloom, and broke their bonds asunder.” Lord, break my bonds, take me out of this darkness. I can’t do this on my own. I don’t have the power, but I’m told you do. I believe, help my unbelief! Amen?

God’s steadfast love endures forever. It is not offered only once and, if refused, withdrawn forever. It keeps coming toward us in gracious waves, until we’re ready for his love to carry us into a new way of living in this world. A world still filled with troubles, but cast in a different light, and therefore lived from a different perspective, a new disposition. Weakness and trouble turned to strength and an opportunity for ministry and for mission.

Summer is often a time to take a step back and reflect on the world around us, and take note, like the Psalmist does, of how God speaks to us through the strong beauty and design of his creation. God’s creation speaks to your imagination, and through your imagination you appreciate the deeper mysteries of life and faith.

After our passage from this morning, in verses 23-32, the Psalmist speaks of the dangerous power of waves at sea. God’s people on a ship are carried atop and through those waves to safety, to their desired haven. It is a picture the Psalm provides for your imagination, with the same theme of God’s love carrying his people through troubled times.

This being summertime, many go to the shore. Perhaps some of you have had the experience of spending time on the beach recently or in the past, felt that healing wind come in off the water, and heard that steady sound of waves rolling in one after the other.

Perhaps when you were a child you took time to fight your way through those waves breaking against you as you ventured out to sea, so you could position yourself far enough out to stand and wait for just the right force to come and meet you.

And in anticipation, just before it arrived at your chest, you leaped up in trust. And if your timing was right, you found yourself atop a swirl of moving water, carrying the full weight of your body, and you were cradled, as if by arms, across the surface of the water, all the way to the shore. And if you missed a good one, you needed only wait for the next.

You could not help but smile and even giggle as you traveled, even as that ride ended with you tumbling in the collapse of swirls and current.

That loss of control is what helped you discover your joy! The sand in your teeth and the water up your nose were reminders that the power of this journey was profound and not for those who feared risk.

I think the realization that you can be carried by a power greater than your own gets at what it means to turn to God for his love with certainty that when you take that leap up in faith, God will be there to carry you through, and deliver you, as the Psalmist writes in verse 30, to your desired haven.

His love is constant, unrelenting, powerful, and may feel dangerous for those who fear to acknowledge it. Sometimes that love takes you on a journey for which you may not feel ready, and but you have committed yourself to ride it out.

Once acknowledged, then experienced. And once experienced, you are transformed to a new way of life—a lifelong reliance on a power that does not fail to deliver and save.

Let those who are wise give heed to these things and consider the steadfast, powerful, gracious love of the Lord.

Let us pray: *Lord, your love is more powerful than we often care to acknowledge, and runs deeper than we often care to admit. Carry us in your steadfast love, redeem us when we make that leap to a new way of living — a way which takes on meaning through our trust and confidence in you to save. In the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*