

THE AFFLICTED PENITENT HOPES IN THE ETERNAL LORD

Sermon for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent, 2017

Psalm 102

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Psalm 102: <sup>1</sup> **O LORD, hear my prayer, and let my cry for help come to You!**

<sup>2</sup> **Do not hide Your face from me in the day when I am in distress! Turn Your ear to me! Answer me quickly when I call!**

<sup>3</sup> **My days have disappeared in smoke, and my bones have been burnt up as in a furnace.**

<sup>4</sup> **My heart has been struck down like grass and has withered. Indeed, I have forgotten to eat my food.**

<sup>5</sup> **Because of my loud groaning my bones cling to my flesh.**

<sup>6</sup> **I have become like a desert owl, like an owl among ruins.**

<sup>7</sup> **I have been keeping awake, and I have been like a bird all alone on a roof.**

<sup>8</sup> **All day long my enemies have been taunting me. Those who make a mockery of me have been using my name as a curse.**

<sup>9</sup> **For I have been eating ashes like bread and I have been mixing tears with my drink, <sup>10</sup> because of Your indignation and Your anger. For You have taken me and thrown me away.**

<sup>11</sup> **My days are like a lengthening shadow, and I am withering away like grass.**

<sup>12</sup> **Nevertheless, You Yourself, O LORD, will be enthroned for ever, and Your fame will endure to all generations.**

<sup>13</sup> **You Yourself will rise and have compassion on Zion, because it is time to be gracious to it. Indeed, the appointed time has come.**

<sup>14</sup> **For Your servants have taken pleasure in its stones, and they have taken pity on its rubble.**

<sup>15</sup> **Nations will fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth will fear Your glory.**

**<sup>16</sup> For the LORD will build up Zion. He will appear in His glory.**

**<sup>17</sup> He will turn His attention to the prayer of naked people, and He will not despise their prayer.**

**<sup>18</sup> Let this be written down for a future generation, that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD!**

**<sup>19</sup> For the LORD will look down from His holy place on high. From heaven the LORD will look at the earth, <sup>20</sup> to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to release those who have been condemned to die, <sup>21</sup> that they may declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and His praise in Jerusalem, <sup>22</sup> when peoples and kingdoms gather together to serve the LORD.**

**<sup>23</sup> He has broken my strength along the road. He has cut short my days.**

**<sup>24</sup> I keep on saying: “My God, do not take me away in the middle of my days! Your years go on through all generations.**

**<sup>25</sup> “Long ago You laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands.**

**<sup>26</sup> “They will perish, but You will endure. They will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will be discarded.**

**<sup>27</sup> “Nevertheless, You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.**

**<sup>28</sup> “The children of Your servants will dwell securely, and their descendants will be established before You.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

So far, the Penitential Psalms we’ve considered during our Lenten journey have all been ascribed to King David. But not every psalm was written by David. The heading of our psalm tonight, Psalm 102, is unusual. The title ascribed to Psalm 102 says it is “*A prayer of a suffering person, who is weary and pours out his complaint before the LORD.*” The biblical story that best fits the circumstances of this psalm is the prolonging of Hezekiah’s life after God had told him that his life was about to end. In Isaiah chapter 38 there is a psalm that Hezekiah wrote in response to that situation (38:9-21). It is very similar to Psalm 102.

Jerusalem had faced an attack by the Assyrians,<sup>1</sup> and it seems Hezekiah at first failed to trust in God and tried to settle matters himself through diplomatic means. Isaiah the prophet was sent to warn King Hezekiah to get his affairs in order, for he would soon die. Whereupon, Hezekiah repented and prayed, not only for his own deliverance, but for the deliverance of all Jerusalem. Isaiah was then sent to tell the king that God had heard his prayer, would deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrians, and would grant Hezekiah fifteen more years of life. Isaiah records that after his illness and recovery, King Hezekiah wrote a psalm or prayer. As we just mentioned, there are many similarities between Psalm 102 and what is recorded in Isaiah 38. Verses 25 and 26 of our text, which read,<sup>25</sup> **“Long ago You laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands.”**<sup>26</sup> **“They will perish, but You will endure. They will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will be discarded,** are also quoted in the New Testament, in Hebrews 1:10-12, as a reference to Christ.

The essence of this Penitential Psalm is that, as Hezekiah learned, once he saw that his own desperate situation was hopeless, the psalm is rich in showing that the penitent finds hope in the midst of affliction in the eternal faithfulness of the Lord.

It seems that King Hezekiah, if he is indeed the author of this psalm, here acknowledges the vanity of life. He wasn't by any means the first to do so. In Psalm 90, written by Moses, he said: *“...from eternity to eternity You are God. <sup>3</sup> You turn mankind back to dust, and say, “Return, children of Adam!” <sup>4</sup> For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes, like a watch in the night. <sup>5</sup> You end their lives while they sleep. They are like grass that is fresh in the morning. <sup>6</sup> In the morning it flourishes and is fresh. In the evening it withers and dries up,”* (2-6). Likewise, as an old man, King Solomon wrote: *“Absolutely pointless! Everything is pointless,”* (Eccl 1:2). The penitent recognises that his days are short and full of trouble.

And so, Hezekiah compares life as something that has **disappeared in smoke**, or as being **struck down like grass and has withered**. Whether we have a few years to live or one hundred, it still can seem all so short, and the

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings 20:1-11; 2 Chron. 32:24-26; Isaiah 38

older we get, the more quickly the time seems to pass. Physical afflictions bring great agony along the way. Pain and anxiety rob us of even the simple pleasures of life such as eating, drinking, and sleeping. Hezekiah has lost his appetite – he has **been eating ashes like bread** and **been mixing tears with (his) drink**. Even Solomon, in reflecting on the pointlessness of life, once said: *“There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from Him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?”* (Eccl 2:24-25). Yet, as a penitent, Hezekiah finds no such enjoyment. In his grief and pain, he feels all alone. He is **lonely like a desert owl, like an owl among ruins.... like a bird all alone on a roof**. Martin Luther observes: *“Blessed are they who realise that this earthly life is only vain because of Adam’s sin, as we read in Ps 78:33: ‘Their days vanish like a breath,’ that is, like smoke; for nothing of it remains that is of any use in yonder life,”* (AE 14:179).

Enemies or people of the world cause the penitent further grief. The author of Psalm 102 complains: **“<sup>8</sup> All day long my enemies have been taunting me. Those who make a mockery of me have been using my name as a curse.”** We don’t know exactly how King Hezekiah may have been ridiculed, but his condition is so horrendous that others can simply use his name as a way to wish the same misery on someone else. As penitent Christians, we can and do know what it is like to be ridiculed by people of the world. Some people ridicule us for trusting in God in the face of our troubles and afflictions. Some ridicule us for not pursuing worldly pleasures and ambitions as they do. And as we struggle with the temptations of the world, our flesh, and the devil, we could quite easily become further frustrated when we see worldly people prospering while we face hardships.

The author of Psalm 102 cries out to God in his affliction, believing it is a result of God’s **indignation** and **anger**. In all afflictions, the penitent recognises that troubles in the world are a consequence of God’s just indignation over sin. The penitent may even feel that the troubles are a result of God’s wrath over personal sin. Like Hezekiah, the penitent may feel that God is seeking to shorten his days. Yet the penitent persists in crying out to God, trusting that he is eternally faithful, merciful, and gracious.

No one can pray this prayer except one who is poor in spirit, one who realises the vanity of the world and longs for spiritual blessings. In his first lectures on the Psalms, Luther states, *“Therefore this psalm is properly esteemed as one to be prayed for the penitent that, as often as they have fallen, they might grieve and say: Behold, I have again been smitten and become dry. And again my days have vanished like smoke, again my bones have dried up like firewood. For, behold, the fire of anger, luxury, gluttony, greed, pride, etc., has again fried me, because I have forgotten to eat my bread (God’s Word). But You, O Lord, do not turn Your face from me. Hear my prayer. And because I often fall and forget, ‘in whatever day I shall call upon You, hear me speedily.’”* (AE 11:303).

The *shortness* of the psalmist’s life contrasts sharply with the *endlessness* of God’s reign. He cries out, **“Nevertheless, You Yourself, O LORD, will be enthroned for ever.”** This is a cry of trust in God’s eternal faithfulness. It is a dramatic turning point from distress to triumph. The Lord’s eternal power will solve the psalmist’s dilemma. The penitent finds hope and comfort only in God’s eternal faithfulness. The penitent trusts God will hear and deliver in mercy and not deal with him in wrath or judgment.

Hezekiah knew God would deliver Zion. His concern for Zion suggests that the psalm was written at a time when Jerusalem was in danger. Here, the psalmist’s prayer is not only for himself but also for the city and people. He is confident that God will preserve His people so that they can continue to worship Him. The psalmist is confident that God will be there for His children.

Yet this is not just deliverance from Assyria; even more, this is the promise of a Saviour. The promise would lead to the Gentiles (the nations) praising God, as well as the praise of God for generations to come: **“<sup>15</sup> Nations will fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth will fear Your glory. <sup>16</sup> For the LORD will build up Zion. He will appear in His glory. <sup>17</sup> He will turn His attention to the prayer of naked people, and He will not despise their prayer. <sup>18</sup> Let this be written down for a future generation, that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD!”** The promise included the releasing of those who have been condemned to die. In his Gospel, Luke recorded: <sup>16</sup> *Then Jesus went to Nazareth, where He had been*

brought up. On the Sabbath He went into the synagogue, as His custom was, and He stood up to read.<sup>17</sup> He was given the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, He found the place where Scripture had said:<sup>18</sup> “The Spirit of the Lord is on Me because He has anointed Me to tell the Good News to poor people. He has sent Me to announce freedom to prisoners and restoration of sight to blind people, to set free those who have been oppressed,<sup>19</sup> and to announce the acceptable year of the Lord.”<sup>20</sup> He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him.<sup>21</sup> He began to tell them, “Today, while you are listening, this passage of Scripture has been fulfilled,” (Luke 4:16-21).

Jesus Christ brings the promised eternal deliverance of God. Jesus is the eternal Word made flesh: “<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> Everything was made through Him, and not one thing that was made was made without Him... <sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father’s only Son – He is full of grace and truth,” (John 1:1-3, 14). The penitent psalmist proclaims: “<sup>25</sup> **“Long ago You laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. <sup>26</sup> “They will perish, but You will endure. They will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will be discarded. <sup>27</sup> “Nevertheless, You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.”** The author of Hebrews cites this as speaking of Jesus Christ, God’s only begotten Son.<sup>2</sup>

In penitence, Hezekiah prayed. God heard his prayer and lengthened his days another fifteen years. But it was not so for the Son of God. During this penitential season of Lent, we remember that His days were shortened. His days were filled with trouble and sorrow for us. He bore our sin and God’s full indignation over our sin as He went to the cross of Calvary. And when Jesus said, “*It is finished,*” God’s just wrath over sin was appeased. Three days later, Jesus rose from the grave and then ascended on high, where He now lives and reigns to all eternity. The psalmist proclaims this wonderful truth:<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 1:10-12

**“Nevertheless, You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.”**

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.<sup>3</sup>

Because of our God’s eternal faithfulness, the penitent psalmist concludes his prayer in confident faith. Despite his torments, suffering, and pain, he knows that <sup>28</sup>“**The children of Your servants will dwell securely, and their descendants will be established before You.**” Martin Luther writes: “*These are the same children, the believers in Christ. They are a spiritual posterity and heirs, yes joint heirs with their fathers, prepared eternally before God, although rejected in time before the world. Christ’s kingdom has no end,*” (AE 14:187).

Through Jesus Christ, we know that although we face suffering and sorrow here in this vale of tears, we are spiritual heirs of His heavenly kingdom, which has no end. Therefore, the afflicted penitent hopes in the eternal Lord! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

#### PRAYER FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Almighty and ever-living King of all creation, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our Father, whom all the heavenly hosts praise and glorify, hear our prayer.

We thank You, heavenly Father, for Your limitless love in the gift of Christ Your Son, for the sacrifice of His life on the cross for us, for the promise of eternal life through His death and resurrection, and for the cleansing of our consciences from dead works by His obedience.

Increase our joy in Your rich blessings: the forgiveness of our sins, deliverance from death and the power of the devil, and the assurance of everlasting life, which Jesus’ crucifixion have obtained for us.

We thank You that in Christ You have spoken to us the words of life. Inspire us to love and worship Him in spirit and in truth. Give us that faith that sees in Him the eternal Godhead, the everlasting I AM, the one who is the same

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<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 13:8

yesterday, today, and for ever. Grant that we may always trust in His mercy, be faithful to His Word, and obey His commandments, and honour Him by losing our lives for His sake and for the Gospel's, as He lost His life to gain us.

In mercy, cleanse and strengthen Your Church, that it may be saved from all weakness and failure, and be filled with power for holy service. Govern the nations on earth, that people everywhere may live in harmony with their fellowmen and serve one another's needs. Pour out Your grace on our homes and on all schools, that the young may be trained for a useful life on earth, and be made ready for the life to come. Bless all who work honestly with mind and hand to provide those things we need for this life. Give all people everywhere joy in doing their daily work, and grant that they may do it as those who are accountable to You.

Help us to use our abilities and possessions faithfully, for everything belongs to You. Forgive us for being selfish and for misusing our gifts. Comfort the suffering, the deprived, the burdened, and the aged. Be the help of the needy, the protector of the helpless, and the Saviour of all people. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

#### FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Ezekiel 37:1-14

<sup>1</sup> The hand of the LORD came on me. He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD, and put me down in the middle of the valley. It was full of bones. <sup>2</sup> He kept leading me past them and all around them. I saw very many of them on the surface of the valley, and saw that they were very dry. <sup>3</sup> Then He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones return to life?" I answered, "Lord GOD, You Yourself know."

<sup>4</sup> Then He told me: "Prophesy over these bones, and tell them, 'Dry bones, listen to the Word of the LORD!' <sup>5</sup> This is what the Lord GOD has said to these bones: "Look! I shall cause breath to enter into you, and you will live. <sup>6</sup> I shall put tendons on you, make flesh come on you, and cover you with skin. I shall put breath in you, and you will return to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'""

<sup>7</sup> So I kept prophesying as I had been commanded. While I was prophesying, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling sound, and

the bones came closer together, one bone attaching itself to another.<sup>8</sup> While I kept looking, I saw that there were tendons on them, flesh grew on them, and skin covered them over. However, there was no breath in them.

<sup>9</sup> Then He told me: “Prophecy to the breath! Prophecy, son of man, and tell the breath, ‘This is what the Lord GOD has said: “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain people, so that they may return to life.”””

<sup>10</sup> So I kept prophesying, as He had commanded me, and breath entered them. They returned to life, and stood up on their feet, an exceedingly large army.

<sup>11</sup> Then He told me: “Son of man, these bones are the whole family of Israel. Look! They are saying, ‘Our bones are dry, and our hope is being lost. We have been completely cut off.’<sup>12</sup> Therefore prophecy and tell them, ‘This is what the Lord GOD has said: “Look, My people! I shall open your graves, and bring you up out of your graves. I shall bring you to the land of Israel.<sup>13</sup> Then, My people, you will know that I am the LORD when I open your graves and bring you up out of your

graves.<sup>14</sup> I shall put My Spirit in you, you will live, and I shall settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I am the LORD. I have spoken, and I shall carry it out,” declares the LORD.””

Romans 8:1-11

<sup>1</sup> Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.<sup>2</sup> For the principle of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the principle of sin and death.<sup>3</sup> For what the Law could not do, because it was weak through the sinful human nature, God has done, by sending His own Son to be like sinful human nature, to be a sin-offering. He has condemned sin in human nature,<sup>4</sup> so that the just requirements of the Law may be fulfilled in us, who do not live according to the sinful human nature, but according to the Spirit.<sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the sinful nature set their minds on the things that belong to the sinful nature; but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things that belong to the Spirit.<sup>6</sup> For the way of thinking that belongs to the sinful nature is death; but the way of thinking that belongs to the Spirit is life and peace.<sup>7</sup> This is so,

because the way of thinking that belongs to the sinful nature is hostile to God. For it is not subordinate to God's Law. For it is not even able to be. <sup>8</sup> Those who are in the sinful nature cannot please God. <sup>9</sup> You, however, are not in the sinful nature, but in the Spirit, if God's Spirit dwells in you. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ; <sup>10</sup> but, if Christ is in you, your bodies are dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is dwelling in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who dwells in you.

John 11:1-45

<sup>1</sup> A man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped His feet with her hair. It was her brother Lazarus who was sick. <sup>3</sup> Therefore his sisters sent someone to tell Jesus, "Lord, look! The one whom You love is sick."

<sup>4</sup> When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness will not end in

death, but it is for the sake of the glory of God, in order that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

<sup>5</sup> Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup> Yet, when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed in the place where He was for two more days. <sup>7</sup> After that, He told His disciples, "Let us go to Judea again!"

<sup>8</sup> The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, recently the Jews were trying to stone You. So are You going back there?"

<sup>9</sup> Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in a day? If anyone walks during the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. <sup>10</sup> However, if anyone walks during the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."

<sup>11</sup> After He said this, He told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going that I may wake him up."

<sup>12</sup> Therefore His disciples said to Him, "Lord, if he has gone asleep, he will be restored to health."

<sup>13</sup> However, Jesus had meant that he was dead; but His disciples thought He meant that Lazarus was taking rest in sleep. <sup>14</sup> Therefore

Jesus then told them plainly, “Lazarus has died,<sup>15</sup> and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. However, let us go to him!”

<sup>16</sup> Therefore Thomas, who was called “The Twin,” said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him!”

<sup>17</sup> So when Jesus arrived, He found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. <sup>18</sup> Bethany was near Jerusalem, about three kilometres away. <sup>19</sup> Many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet Him, while Mary kept sitting in the house. <sup>21</sup> So Martha told Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> However, even now I know that God will give You whatever You ask from God.”

<sup>23</sup> Jesus told her, “Your brother will rise again.”

<sup>24</sup> Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”

<sup>25</sup> Jesus told her, “I am the Resurrection and the Life. The person who believes in Me will live even if he dies,<sup>26</sup> and

everyone who lives and believes in Me will assuredly never die. Do you believe this?”

<sup>27</sup> She told Him, “Yes, Lord, I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”

<sup>28</sup> After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary. She told her in private, “The Teacher is here, and He is asking for you.”

<sup>29</sup> When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to Him. <sup>30</sup> Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met Him. <sup>31</sup>

Then the Jews who had been in the house with Mary and had been comforting her saw her get up quickly and leave. They followed her, thinking that she was going to the tomb, to weep there. <sup>32</sup> So, when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell down at His feet. She said to Him, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.”

<sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews weeping who had come with her, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled.

<sup>34</sup> He asked, “Where have you laid him?”

They said to Him, "Lord, come and see!"

<sup>35</sup> Jesus wept. <sup>36</sup> Therefore the Jews said, "See how He loved him!"

<sup>37</sup> However, some of them asked, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, also have kept this man from dying?"

<sup>38</sup> So Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone had been laid against it.

<sup>39</sup> Jesus said, "Move the stone away!"

Martha, the dead man's sister, told Him, "Lord, he smells already. He has been dead for four days."

<sup>40</sup> Jesus asked her, "Did I not tell you, 'If you believe, you will see the glory of God'?"

<sup>41</sup> So they moved the stone away. Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. <sup>42</sup> I have known that You always hear Me, but I have spoken because of the crowd that is standing around Me, so that they may believe that You have sent Me."

<sup>43</sup> After Jesus had said this, He called out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out here!"

<sup>44</sup> The man who had died came out, with his feet and hands tied up with bandages, and with his face

wrapped with a cloth. Jesus told them, "Unwrap him and let him go!"

<sup>45</sup> Therefore many of the Jews who had come to Mary and who had seen what Jesus did began to believe in Him.