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12/8/2019

Isaiah 11:1-10

Matthew 3:1-12

"Let There be Peace on Earth"

## Opening

- This past Friday, I did a very foolish thing and this darn winter weather really got the better of me.
  - I foolishly weathered the ice storm, coming by the church office to pick up a couple of things and as I was exiting the west entrance, I slipped on the ice- a solid sheet- starting on the very top step.
    - As I was going down, my tailbone hit every single step until I reached the bottom.
    - I'm happy to report that other than a very wet backside and wounded pride, I'm injury free.
    - Now it's interesting what pops into a fella's mind in embarrassing moments like that and as I was slip-sliding-away, two things came to mind.
    - The first thing that popped into my head was "I wonder how many steps there are to this entrance?"
      - Just so you know, there are six.
      - I don't think I could have told you that last week, but I know that for sure now.
    - And second thing that popped into my head was "Oh Lord, please, please don't let anyone be watching this embarrassing moment!"
  - Well, to be honest, that unwise, careless choice and the resulting fall characterized the sort of week I'd been having.
    - Life can be like that, you know?
  - We live each day, encountering goodness and challenges and over time, the collective of those days takes on a certain ebb and flow.
    - Difficulties are often the result of decisions we make- a manifestation of sin which exists in and around us.
  - So, this past week hasn't been my greatest, but today marks a new week and I'm optimistic that it's going to be a great one.

- That's just the way life is- sometimes it is so good and sometimes it is so very challenging.

## King David

- That was true of King David, for whom this morning's OT reading was written.
  - We're likely familiar David's story- he was just a simple shepherd boy who was picked for kingship over all of his brothers.
  - As a young boy, he defeated Goliath, the giant Philistine warrior who had struck fear in the hearts of everyone else.
  - David was the King of Israel from for nearly 40 years and being a great warrior, his kingdom grew over the years with each succeeding victory.
  - David enjoyed immense success.
- But David was also human, with human failings and he fell into sin- he gave in to his lust and had an affair with Bathsheba, who became pregnant.
  - To cover his sin, he ordered that Bathsheba's husband, Uriah be sent to the front lines of battle, where he was killed.
  - And then the prophet Nathan confronts David, identifying the snare David has set for himself.
  - And as David fasts and pleads with God, the son he had with Bathsheba dies.
- Do you see that ebb and flow in David's life- times of greatness and joy and times of challenge and suffering?
  - David had experienced what the psalmist calls the "desolate pit,"- the pit of death and destruction.
    - A place of loneliness and fear-
    - A place of hopeless guilt and depression.
  - We've all probably heard the saying "life is the pits"- a reference to difficult times and David experienced those in his life.
    - He was suffering- perhaps the consequences of his own actions- his own sin, but suffering none-the-less.
  - He'd been caught in this "miry bog"- something we might refer to as quicksand, or swampland.
    - It's a metaphor of the dreary, dismal, ruinous state of his life, filled with sin and guilt.
  - David is tormented by his circumstances.

- Worse yet, he knows they are of his own doing.
- And he can't save himself from the guilt he feels, over the corruption in his heart.
- And he knows this- because he's been in that pit and that mire before.
  - He had been a fugitive, hiding from King Saul.
  - He'd been lonely, hiding in deserted caves, while the King was looking for him.
- But David had made it through those times.
  - God had pulled him out of that pit of death and desolation.
  - He escaped and prospered, to become the king of a mighty country
  - But then he does something stupid and lands himself right back in that pit.
- And he finds himself separated from the God he once knew.
- You see, time and again, David's heart was broken and when you read through the Psalms, you begin to see his troubled heart.
  - And there was little he could do, but to put his faith and trust in God, to lift him up out of the pit once again.
    - In those moments, all David knew what to do was to cry out to God.

### **David's story is Jesus' story**

- As we heard the NT reading today, where Jesus is beginning his ministry by taking on new disciples, we are reminded of how his journey had an ebb and flow to it as well.
  - Gathering new followers is exciting and I am reminded of how we feel each time we receive new members in this congregation.
    - In just a few weeks, we'll be baptizing and confirming new members and it will be a joyful and exciting day!
    - And I imagine it was exciting for Jesus to receive these new disciples.
  - Jesus experienced times of joy, but he also endured times of extreme hardship.
  - Jesus experienced the loneliness of the Garden of Gethsemane as he prayed for God to take away his burden.
    - He suffered and died for all humanity
      - He was raised up on a cross, had the life squeezed out of him.

- And then he was buried in the dark pit of death and desolation.
- Jesus experienced the agony of separation from God on the cross as he cried out, “My God, why have you forsaken me?”

### **David’s story is the disciples’ story**

- And it might help us remember those two disciples of John, who were curious about this man called the “Lamb of God”.
  - What joy must they have felt as they exclaimed “We have found the Messiah!”
  - Imagine how they must have felt when Jesus invited them to become his first disciples- the excitement of being called, to travel far and wide as heralds of the message about the Messiah?
  - What joy must the early followers have experienced in being so close to God, who walked with them.
- And yet, they found themselves in the pit of life and caught up in the mire.
  - All of the Disciples abandoned Jesus- they ran away and hid, when Jesus was arrested.
    - As Jesus had foretold, Peter denied three times, even knowing Jesus.
    - And we know how Judas got caught in the miry bog of greed and deception and he betrayed Jesus.
  - According to the Roman historian Josephus, James was reported to have been stoned and then clubbed to death by order of the high priest Annas (Josephus, Antiquity of the Jews.)
  - Peter was arrested and crucified upside down.
  - And Paul who would come a bit later, would die for his faith, being beheaded.
- The lives of the Disciples had an ebb and flow to them and they experienced great joy, as-well-as times in the pit.
- So, you see, this Psalm doesn't just describe the ebb and flow in David's life- it's about Jesus' life and it's about the Disciples lives too.

### **David’s story is our story too.**

- And it’s about our life- because we too, will find ourselves thrown into the pit of death and desolation.
  - I mean, have we never experienced doubts and fear—have we never been overwhelmed by the sin in our lives?
  - Have we never been “in the pit?”

- Never experienced the struggle with illness, feeling the desperation to get well?
- Never faced the death of a loved one?
- Never experienced divorce?
- Never been challenged with financial troubles?
- Never felt separated from God?
- We've all been like David, facing life's problems, not knowing what to do, leaving us wanting to cry out in desperation.
  - And if you've faced those times, then you know the feeling of being stuck in the miry bog, with an overwhelming sense that you're about to be thrown into the pit of death and despair.

### **What is next?**

- In David's moment of desperation, he cried out to God and God raised him up.
  - We too can cry out to God.
  - In those moments when we don't know what to do, God knows what it takes to help us overcome the difficulties which plague our lives.
  - When it seems that there is nowhere else to turn for comfort and help, we need to remember the story of David.
    - And remember how God drew David up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set David's feet back on solid rock.
    - God gave David the comfort and help he needed to get through those difficult times and God is our comfort and help too.
- One lesson David's story tells us, is that there will be times in our lives when we find ourselves in the pit of despair and desolation.
  - But the other lesson we discover is we don't have to stay in that pit- God won't keep us in that pit.
  - And if you need the free gift of God's grace, forgiveness of sins, whatever it may be which separates you from God- IT'S YOURS for the asking.
    - It's already been offered up to you.
    - And all you need to do is cry out to God and place your trust fully in that free grace- the grace offered from the cross of Jesus.

- Confess to God and by faith and trust, God who is faithful, will lift you from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set your feet back on solid rock.
- Friends, we don't have to stay in the pit!
  - We simply need to ask for God to lift us out.
- And when we do that, God will respond.
  - As the Psalmist tells us, God will put a new song in our hearts, a song of praise to our God.
  - May we sing that song of praise.
  - May we it ever so loudly.
    - Today and all of the days of our lives.
- Amen