

Preaching from St. Stephen's Pulpit

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, Williamsburg, VA

December 1, 2024

“Let me not be put to shame”

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Beloved by God, my siblings in Christ; grace to you and peace from God our Creator and our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So now we start the season of Advent. The season of waiting. But I want to remind you that we are **not** waiting for Christmas! While Advent is about our expectation that Christ is coming, we're not diligently waiting for him to come for the first time! That's what Christmas is celebrating, not Advent. Advent is all about waiting for the promised **return** of our Messiah, our Savior. God-with-us who shows us what it means to live as we were created to live. Our compassionate Christ who meets us where we are and loves us too much to leave us where he finds us.

Now that that reminder is out of the way, I want to remind you of another tradition. Not only is this the season of Advent, but it is also the first Sunday of that season, which is traditionally referred to as the Sunday of Hope. I don't know about you, but I could use some hopeful news lately. But our Gospel text seems a little light on hope. So let's turn our hopeful eyes towards a different reading this morning, Psalm 25:1-10.

The psalmist begins these verses with some powerful words of trust in God. To you I lift up my soul...let me not be put to shame. Then there's this turn towards the ways of God, literally in the Hebrew, the beaten path of God:¹ make me know your ways and lead me in your truth. Lastly then the psalmist reminds God of God's own nature (a common occurrence in the psalms): be mindful of your mercy and steadfast love; do not remember my sins; lead and teach the humble; your paths are steadfast love and faithfulness.

If we were to continue on in this psalm, we would find the reasons the psalmist is pleading in this way. In verses 11-19 we hear how the psalmist is lonely and afflicted, how numerous his foes are and how much he is hated. All of this is concluded with a final expression of trust in God: “O guard my life and deliver me; do not let me be

¹ <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/1869.htm>

put to shame, for I take refuge in you. May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you. Redeem Israel, O God, out of all its troubles.”²

Now the fascinating theme in all of this, I think anyway, is the expectant stance the psalmist is taking. All of this trust talk, all of the reminders of God’s steadfast love and faithfulness, the begging to be instructed in God’s ways...all of this is articulating a particular sort of relationship. The Psalmist is calling On God to be God in the face of his trials and tribulations. “Let me not be put to shame” the psalmist says, but more importantly, “don’t let yourself be shamed by inaction” he is saying to God!

The Psalmist, in a very powerful sense, is waiting for God to be God. This is exactly what Advent is about! We are waiting for God to be God. We spend time every week engaging with God’s Word. We study it and grapple with it. We wrestle with God’s call for how we are called to live our lives. And we place our trust in the God we encounter there. We place our trust in a God who forgives sin, who heals and reconciles, who feeds and clothes, who welcomes and accepts, and a God who shows up when needed (though God never really leaves).

This Advent let us boldly call upon God to be God! We can take a cue from the psalmist. God...we know you to be a God of mercy and compassion, justice and providence, healing and wholeness...be that! Work in this broken world! Let us who believe in you, who try to follow your Way, let us not be put to shame! God, act! Let not God be put to shame! Act! God-with-us...be with us now!

Does this shock you? This calling God to account? Calling on God to be who God says God is? It’s what the psalmist is doing! It’s what Jesus encourages us to do too! “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away,” Jesus says. God’s words...which include God’s covenantal promises, will not pass away. Though everything else will fail, God’s Word, Jesus Christ, will not. So we can be bold in asking for God’s presence with us. God’s wisdom and strength to guide us.

See, that’s the other side of all of this. The obedience piece, the walking the Way piece. We have been saved. God’s nature is salvific. God’s nature is loving and gracious. God’s nature is to be with the poor, the suffering, the oppressed, the naked, the hungry. So if we have been saved by a God who is in the business of saving, we can boldly expect God’s continued salvific action. And from the position of having-been-saved we are invited into the creating/salvific work too!

² Psalm 25:20-22 (NRSVUE)

“Let us not be put to shame” and we won’t be put to shame when we’re clinging to the eternal word of God. “Let us not be put to shame” and we won’t be put to shame when we are on God’s side, which is the side of the poor and the marginalized, the oppressed and powerless. “Let us not be put to shame” and we won’t be put to shame when we’re speaking truth to power. “Let us not be put to shame” and we won’t be put to shame when we’re calling out broken systems and evil outcomes.

God will be God – God will be where we least expect – the cross. God goes to the broken places of the world, to the broken places of our lives, and redeems them... makes them whole and blesses them. God calls us into similar action, to be willing to go to the broken places of the world...the broken people of the world...the places and people our world calls shameful...that’s there God can be found. And because of God’s steadfast love we know that there is no shame there! For God is there, working for healing and wholeness.

So when the world is yelling at us to be quiet about the injustices of the world. When we are attacked for calling our systems into question. “Let us not be put to shame” for in doing so we are joining in God’s continuing creative activity. When systems fight back, and they always do (usually with violence and oppression), “let us not be put to shame” for the system arrested Jesus too, tortured him, and murdered him for putting them to shame. But God’s Word is eternal, and for as often as the world tries to put the Word to death, it rises...again and again.

We are in a season of hopeful waiting. We are waiting on the coming of Christ. That time when the cosmos will be redeemed, once and for all. And in this season of hopeful waiting, we call upon God to **be** God! And in so doing we acknowledge that our relationship with God, our own desire to follow in the Way, means that we are called to join in the work of God.

As we engage with God's Word and strive to follow the Way, we are assured that we will not be put to shame when we align ourselves with God's values. We are called to join in God's salvific work, advocating for the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed. In doing so, we participate in God's ongoing creative activity, confident that God's Word is eternal and that God's presence is with us, even in the most broken places.

Let us embrace this season of hopeful waiting with the assurance that God is with us, working for healing and wholeness. Let us not be put to shame, for we are on the side of God's eternal truth and love. Amen.