

Your Redemption Is Drawing Near  
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**Psalm 25:1-10**

- <sup>1</sup> To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.  
<sup>2</sup> O my God, in you I trust;  
do not let me be put to shame;  
do not let my enemies exult over me.  
<sup>3</sup> Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;  
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.
- <sup>4</sup> Make me to know your ways, O Lord;  
teach me your paths.  
<sup>5</sup> Lead me in your truth, and teach me,  
for you are the God of my salvation;  
for you I wait all day long.
- <sup>6</sup> Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love,  
for they have been from of old.  
<sup>7</sup> Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;  
according to your steadfast love remember me,  
for your goodness' sake, O Lord!
- <sup>8</sup> Good and upright is the Lord;  
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.  
<sup>9</sup> He leads the humble in what is right,  
and teaches the humble his way.  
<sup>10</sup> All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,  
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

**Luke 21:25-36**

- <sup>25</sup> 'There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. <sup>26</sup>People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>27</sup>Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in a cloud" with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup>Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.'
- <sup>29</sup> Then he told them a parable: 'Look at the fig tree and all the trees; <sup>30</sup>as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. <sup>31</sup>So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. <sup>32</sup>Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. <sup>33</sup>Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.
- <sup>34</sup> 'Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, <sup>35</sup>like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup>Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.'

This reading from Luke is undoubtedly apocalyptic in tone yet we cannot consider it definitive in describing a time – there are hundreds of failed predictions of the end of the earth to prove this. There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, but what they will be we do not know and likely cannot imagine. The nations will be confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves and people will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world. Jesus tells us through Luke that “when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” In other words, when others are stopped, frozen, by fear and foreboding, do not give yourselves over to fear, and cower, but instead stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.

It’s important to clarify what redemption means in this context. Mariam J. Kamell of the University of St. Andrew’s explains, “Regarding the term ‘redemption,’ Luke describes liberation from the fallen world and its corruption, not the Pauline sense of forgiveness of sin and deliverance from its just penalty. Those who trust in God and live faithfully need not fear when the world collapses around them.” She continues, “Rather, they should stand confidently, trusting in God’s faithfulness to bring about their emancipation...”<sup>1</sup> Liberation from the fallen world and its corruption. When everyone is afraid, stand up and raise your heads because God will free us from the powers and failings of this world. These words were spoken by Jesus to the Jews who feared the powers and failings of the Roman Empire – stand up and raise your heads because even now you are being freed. These words are also spoken to us: When everyone is afraid, stand up and raise your heads because God will free us from the powers and failing of this world.

We are called to be in this world but not of it, and we are being freed. We are called to love the stranger when others are fearful, and we are being freed. We are called to visit the imprisoned when others look down upon them, and we are being freed. We are called to care for those in need when others would turn away, and we are being freed. It’s not that fearful things aren’t around us – they are – it’s that we have confidence in facing them because of our God. In noting the praises given to God in the psalm, Pastor Robert J. Gench points out: “What is astounding about these affirmations is that the psalmist seems to know all about the threats that life can bring, yet nonetheless places utter trust in God.”<sup>2</sup> Professor Robin Gallaher Branch repeats the thought, saying, “The psalmist does not request a removal of his troubles but instead demands guidance and instruction to meet them.”<sup>3</sup>

As we enter into Advent today, we actively begin awaiting a baby in whom we trust above the threats that life can bring and we await a baby who will give us guidance and instruction in meeting the

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<sup>1</sup> *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 1*, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

troubles we face and will face. Our reading from Luke reminds us, though, that we are also, and in all seasons of the church, awaiting the return of Christ, who will once and for all remove that which threatens us, will remove that which troubles us.

Professor Branch explains the language which opens our psalm – To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul – saying, “David begins by lifting up his soul, the essence of who he is, to his God. In Israelite culture, this means lifting up one’s hands. The hands are empty – without weapons, without even gifts.”<sup>4</sup> She continues by describing David as “vulnerable, exposed, and urgently needy.” At our best, this is how we come to the manger – the same way we find the one in the manger – vulnerable, exposed, and urgently needy. And we do this because we have confidence, utter trust even, in the God we will find, the God we now await, the God who has come and who is to come again.

The anticipation we have as we approach Christmas, hope-fully awaiting the arrival of our Savior, is an anticipation fitting every season of the church, and every season of our lives. It’s easier, though, to keep up this excitement for a few weeks than it is for weeks and months and years on end. Jesus knew this and told the disciples, and us, “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly like a trap...Be alert at all times.” He knew this so well that he also told the parables of bridesmaids who ran out of oil for their lamps while awaiting the return of the bridegroom and of the talents given to servants and their master returning unexpectedly, wanting to know what they had done with what they had been given.<sup>5</sup> Keep awake, he says.

It will be easy to keep in anticipation for the remembering of the first coming of Christ, in the same way children wait for birthdays and vacations and other special events. I don’t have a blueprint for you which lays out how to hold onto your anticipation throughout the year – in fact, I am still figuring it out for myself. What I do have is encouragement to find your own ways. What helps you remember that we are called to be in this world but not of it, that we are called to love the stranger when others are fearful, that we are called to visit the imprisoned when others look down upon them, that we are called to care for those in need when others would turn away? Goodwill abounds this season, and it can abound year-round. Perhaps we keep around a reminder of Christmas to help us remember that Christ will come again and in hopes that we will behave as if Christ’s arrival is just weeks away. The psalmist offers this prayer: “Do not remember the sins from my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness’ sake, O Lord.” Perhaps this becomes a daily prayer – remember me,

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<sup>4</sup> *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 1*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 25.

for your goodness' sake. May we each find ways to remember, each day, that we can confidently stand up and raise our heads when the world is filled with fear and failings.

Let us pray: Remember us, O Lord, for your goodness' sake. Amen.