

All is God

Sunday 26 July 2026

Psalm 102: 1-11

1
Hear my prayer, Lord;
let my cry for help come to you.

2
Do not hide your face from me
when I am in distress.
Turn your ear to me;
when I call, answer me quickly.

3
For my days vanish like smoke;
my bones burn like glowing embers.

4
My heart is blighted and withered like grass;
I forget to eat my food.

5
In my distress I groan aloud
and am reduced to skin and bones.

6
I am like a desert owl,
like an owl among the ruins.

7
I lie awake; I have become
like a bird alone on a roof.

8
All day long my enemies taunt me;
those who rail against me use my name as a curse.

9
For I eat ashes as my food
and mingle my drink with tears

10
because of your great wrath,
for you have taken me up and thrown me aside.

11
My days are like the evening shadow;
I wither away like grass.

Matthew 25: 31-45

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes

and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

45 "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

Opening prayer (Europakloster Gut Aich, by way of Brother David Steindl-Rast):

Almighty, gracious, and merciful God, together with all people of goodwill we pray for peace in this world to touch the hearts of all people and grant us thoughts of peace and reconciliation.

Pour into our hearts reverence for the life of every individual; for the life of all peoples, religions, and nations; and for the gift of creation.

Grant that the will for peace may overcome hatred and that vengeance may give way to reconciliation.

Let all people know that they are all your children, brothers and sisters on whom you bestow your love, and let all of us live in this love.

Gracious God, make me and all people instruments of your peace.

There's a famous riddle that often confounds adults, but which kids usually get right away. Maybe you know it: what is greater than God and lower than the devil?

Answer: Nothing.

The universe that in its vastness defies comprehension; the tiniest subatomic particles, and the elusive energies that constitute matter [about which I refer you to Lee Roberts]; the enigma of life and sentience; and all other infinities are products of God's limitless creativity, and all mysteries are infinitesimal splinters of God's unfathomable ineffability.

The book of John opens with a passage I imagine many of you can recite [John 1: 1-3]:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

We tend to think of creation and ourselves as being separate from one another, and both creation and ourselves as separate from God, distinct in both form and substance from God's self. We contemplate God as progenitor, author, ruler, parent, messiah, all of which roles are defined in terms of *otherness*. And for sure, God is *other* in the sense of being beyond all human ken. As the Psalmist sang, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain."

Or in the less poetic speech of my favorite disciple, also from the book of John: [John 14: 5-7]
Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

For quite some time now, I have been gestating a thought — alternately comforting and troubling — that maybe we really do know God, not only through Jesus' life and death and resurrected presence, but through all of creation.

What if we are not apart from creation but inextricable from it? And what if creation is not separate from God at all, but actually exists *within* God? What if everything and everyone really are sacred? And what if that sacredness is innate? Not merely (!) as external manifestations of the creator's will, thought that would surely be more than enough, but as *internal* manifestations of the creator's own essence?

What if everything and everyone are suffused with the divine because we are all lovingly articulated expressions — embodied love — within God's loving self?

If that is so, then truly all we do or fail to do is directed at God, because God is all there is. There is nothing else.

By corollary, evil is that which denies or abuses the sanctity of anyone or anything, because it is rejecting Godself.

Listen again to the anguished cry of the Psalmist, praying for those in agony everywhere and everywhen — including right now:

Hear my prayer, Lord;
let my cry for help come to you.
Do not hide your face from me
when I am in distress.
Turn your ear to me;
when I call, answer me quickly.
For my days vanish like smoke;
my bones burn like glowing embers.
My heart is blighted and withered like grass;
I forget to eat my food.
In my distress I groan aloud
and am reduced to skin and bones.
I am like a desert owl,
like an owl among the ruins.

I lie awake; I have become
like a bird alone on a roof.
All day long my enemies taunt me;
those who rail against me use my name as a curse.
For I eat ashes as my food
and mingle my drink with tears
because of your great wrath,
for you have taken me up and thrown me aside.
My days are like the evening shadow;
I wither away like grass.

With all respect to the Psalmist, is it really God who casts aside? Or are we — tiny, rebelliously aberrant motes of God — the ones who turn away?

During our service + learning trip in the Pine Ridge Reservation, our group saw and heard the economic, physical, and spiritual suffering of our Lakota relatives, and their deep and beautiful dignity. They persist despite centuries of continuing genocide, deprivation, and erasure.

Over the course of our visit, several people — Lakota and white alike — bemoaned both the persistent external oppression of Federal and State entities and the increasingly entrenched internal corruption of tribal officials who enrich themselves at the expense of their Lakota tribal relatives. The cruel irony is that after centuries of persecuting Indigenous peoples in the name of white supremacy, and forcibly compelling them to abandon their identities to assimilate into white normative social systems, white people now scorn those tribal leaders for assimilating all too well: “How could they do that to their own people?” The self-damning implication of that statement is (a) *they* and *their* people are not *we* and *our* people, and (b) intra-tribal depredation justifies white derision: clearly *those people* (those savages) deserve no better. But take note: Jesus tells us very plainly that our Lakota relatives **are** our own people, because they are Jesus’ people. And look again: self-serving tribal leaders are behaving just like white demagogues who amass wealth and power at the expense of their constituents.

The evil isn’t inherent in the identity of the person or community, whether white or Lakota or any other. The evil is in causing, or condoning, or simply ignoring the suffering of another. The sin lies in being actively or passively complicit in the evil and reconciled to it.

While it’s very gratifying to lay the blame at someone else’s door, I am not excused from that accounting.

Rick and I are not wealthy, at least by conventional Western standards. But we have a comfortable, structurally sound home. We have more than enough food to eat, and a wide variety of fresh, nutritious, healthy food at that. We don’t have to worry about whether we will have to burn our furniture to keep the house above freezing, or whether we will be able to safely leave our home, stay in it, or return to it when storms bring wind, rain, or snow. We have reliable indoor plumbing, and clean drinking water. We have ready access to healthcare. We don’t fear for ourselves or our dear ones to be assaulted, murdered or trafficked.

And these are just some of the ways we are immeasurably safer and wealthier than our Lakota relatives — and billions of other relatives here in the States and around the world — who share few or none of these basic luxuries that we take for granted.

Moreover, even though we may tell ourselves that injustice and suffering are out of our hands, not our doing, not our fault, nevertheless the very political, financial, economic, and social systems that serve our purposes and sustain our comforts are actively causing injustice and suffering, and creating catastrophic ecosystem destruction besides.

The ugly reality is that just like corrupt officials, tech bros, robber barons, warlords, and every other flavor of demagogue across time and geography, we are prospering at the expense of our family members and creation itself.

Our willful blindness to that reality testifies against us, just like the people who are counted as goats in the prophecy from Matthew. We are guilty — not just Rick and I, but all of us — by our actions and by our inactions, of committing evil against God.

Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me...whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.”

Choosing to ignore that relationship, or worse, to deny the legitimacy of our relatives’ suffering, only confirms our culpability.

So how shall we atone?

How shall we atone?

How shall we reconcile ourselves to our relatives and creation and all that is God?

I believe this congregation has been prayerfully working toward that question toward for some time now. In Emily Dickenson’s words, we’ve been approaching it circuitously, indirectly, *telling it slant*, lest we be blinded by the unfiltered truth of our sin and our calling to Christ’s Way. I believe with God’s help we are now beginning to face it more plainly and directly, without euphemisms or caveats. We are beginning to come to terms with the past and future legacy of our building and grounds, our endowment, our place within God’s beloved community. Those of you who have taken active leadership roles in this effort can attest that it is daunting work, and it’s not surprising that it challenges our self-conceptions as individuals and as a congregation. It’s so very tempting to point to the good we do and have done, and count ourselves as righteous sheep.

Again, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me...whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.”

Notice Jesus did not say whatever was easy, or convenient, or popular, or felt good, or improved our own circumstances. He said whatever we do or do not do.

That couldn’t be much less ambiguous. In all of our thoughts, words, and actions, we are either blessing God or doing evil against God. Jesus makes it clear that we are fully responsible for all of our choices.

What a terrifying prospect!

Thank heaven God has promised to always be with us, so we are not reliant on ourselves alone. And when we turn away or fail, God always welcomes our repentance. Every day is the day the Lord has made. Every moment is an opportunity to bless God.

As Dr. Maya Angelou famously taught, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

Having been indicted by the suffering and the shared divinity of our family on the Pine Ridge Reservation and elsewhere around the world, and the groaning and shared divinity of creation, we are beginning to know better. Now by the grace of God we must choose to do better.

No more turning away from the weak and the weary / No more turning away from the coldness inside / Just a world that we all must share / It's not enough just to stand and stare / Is it only a dream that there'll be / No more turning away? [Pink Floyd: On The Turning Away]

Knowing that all is God, how will we rethink our individual preconceptions and allegiances?

How will we reorder our family priorities and relationships?

How will we faithfully discern and answer God's call for the ministries of this congregation and this extraordinary facility?

How will we reevaluate and reallocate our individual and collective financial assets, influence, and other resources to bless God and resist evil?

How will we recognize God in ourselves and the people, creatures, and natural world crying out in agony all around us, and how will we respond to gratefully express God's lovingkindness back to God's self?

Relying on the Spirit's infinite help and mercy, may we truly be followers of Jesus in all we think and say and do, and may we truly incarnate God's presence with our entire selves. Not just on Sundays or within our comfort zone, but every day together growing in faith, serving in love, and welcoming all with joy.

Amen.

Benediction, adapted from the Evangelical and Reformed Church Book of Worship:

Left side: May the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit, rest upon you, abide with you, and strengthen you always with all might unto every good word and work.

Right side: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forever.