

Revived

Advent Midweek #2 – 12/13/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Psalm 85:1-13 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 6, [The people of Judah cry out in prayer,] **“Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?”**

Introduction

✘ Many of you are likely aware of Mike Rowe, the TV host and actor on the Discovery Channel's show *Dirty Jobs*. I've only seen advertisements for the show since I don't have cable, but the premise is that for each episode Mike takes the viewers deep into the less-than-pleasant details of real-life jobs that are grimy, gruesome, dangerous and down-right disgusting.

→ The fact is there are just certain things that must be done so that life in a civilized society can remain clean and civilized. And so Mike is the guy who will go out, put on the gloves and mask, grab a shovel, and show the rest of the world what these jobs are like, while you and I get to remain mess-free and smell-free on our couches.

→ Some of the worst jobs Mike has attempted and shown the viewers have been things like a sewer inspector, a snake venom researcher – where you gather venom from the deadliest snakes in the world by hand and being on the county road crew that is tasked with picking up dead animals. They even filmed one entire episode on that topic that was later deemed to be “too gross” to air on TV.

✘ Roadkill: that's what God's people in the southern kingdom of Israel looked like at the time that our second *Resounding Psalm for Advent* is set in history. A lot has happened on the history timeline since last Wednesday when we were in Psalm 80. Approximately 184 years have passed since then; when we heard about the northern kingdom losing their land to the Assyrians. By now the people in the southern region of Judah – also nicknamed “Jacob” as we see in verse one, have been overrun by King Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC.

→ Their leaders and prominent citizens had been carted away and held captive in Babylon for 70 years; the Temple was destroyed and the city of Jerusalem had been demolished to the ground. It seemed like there was nothing that could give them life or hope. And so the music leaders from the tribe of Levi, known as the *Sons of Koran* wrote in Psalm 85 a plea for the people to sing in worship, O God, “Will you not *revive* us again?” (v. 6) Fortunately, from such a sense of lifeless desperation, the psalm turns the hearts and minds of the worshipers to robustly declare at the end that God is faithful to revive His people.

I. God Revived the People of Judah

✘ One of the worst jobs that Mike Rowe experienced and shared is that very enviable job of being an “anti-shark-bite-suit tester.” I know – who even knew that there was such a job, right! (I guess you and I both missed that booth on career day at high school.) But just in case you might be interested, you are most likely qualified for this line of work, because all you have to do is strap on the suit and dive into the feeding frenzy. With fins to the left and fins to the right, you would then get the pleasure of being live bait. And here you thought you knew what a hostile work environment was!

→ Well, those southern exiles were eventually allowed to return to Jerusalem, but when they did, they had to dive into a very hostile environment and rebuild the temple and the city wall – all while being vulnerable to imminent attack from their neighboring countries. Allow me to set the stage for you.

- ⊗ Why would God allow His Temple – the place where He promised to physically reside on earth among His people, to be destroyed? Because Judah turned their backs on Yahweh just like the northern kingdom had done – worshiping idols of all kinds. They were not worshipping faithfully in God’s Temple. They were contaminating His Temple to the point that His anger burned “hot” as verse three says.
 - ➔ But now their punishment; God’s time of loving discipline has reached its end and God has shown His mercy to them. Judah was coming back home! Home – back to Jerusalem. Verses 1-3, “Yahweh, You were favorable to Your land; You restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of Your people; You covered all their sin. You withdrew all Your wrath; You returned from Your hot anger.” Yes, God has called His people back to revive them; to bring the entire nation of His promised people, who had been dead in the guilt of their sin, back to life.
- ⊗ But in His wisdom God did not just place them in a pampered position. No, He dropped them in the middle of a feeding frenzy. They came back to Jerusalem where they were surrounded by enemies. Their repentance and faith now needed to bear important fruit.
 - ➔ So, first they had to recommit themselves to rebuilding the temple. That took the first many years after they arrived. Then chapter four in Nehemiah tells us how, almost a century later, wicked men named Tobiah and Sanballat did everything possible to harass, worry, bother, and be all-around nasty to those who were rebuilding the ruined city of David.
- ⊗ Imagine being one of those who returned to these circumstances. They had to work and rebuild the city and its walls surrounded by enemies who wanted nothing more than to see them fail. Tobiah jeered and taunted the workers saying, “Yes, what they are building – if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!” (Neh. 4:3) They were basically mocking the people; telling them that they were worthless; that they had no chance of finishing even one section of the city wall before it would crash down around their ears.
 - ➔ God’s people are in a difficult place, doing a difficult job, in a hostile environment. Mike Rowe could not have dreamed this job up even while pretending to be a hot lunch in an anti-shark suit.

II. We Pray, “Revive Us...”

- ⊗ I’m guessing that many of you know at least something of what this is like. So...where’s your hostile environment? Maybe it’s work or school or home. You’ve got dirty jobs in difficult places. Maybe you’re surrounded by people who want you to fail; someplace where the taunts and the bullying never stops.
 - ➔ And so, like those exiles who returned to Jerusalem, because of the enemies that you are facing, it feels as if you have to work with one hand, and hold some kind of defensive weapon in the other.
- ⊗ Perhaps, in faith you have come to understand that God blessed you; that He brought you to this place, even as difficult as it is. But you’re not yet convinced that He’s going to bring you through it.
 - ➔ It’s then that your prayers start to sound a lot like those in verses 4–7, “Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away Your indignation toward us! Will You be angry with us forever? Will you prolong Your anger to all generations? Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You? Show us Your steadfast love, O Yahweh, and grant us Your salvation.”

III. Our Revival Comes from Jesus

- ✘ God blessed and helped the Jews by sending them a governor named Nehemiah. He directed the work of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. His leadership guided the people with his own version of what might be called, “praise the Lord and pass the ammunition.” He organized the people into work groups that literally worked with one hand on a shovel and the other holding a weapon. And the work was slow, but it progressed all the same until the city wall was fully repaired. It’s then that the prayerful refrain in Psalm 85:12 would be heard, “Yes, Yahweh will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.”
- ✘ You and I have that same kind of confidence and certainty; that yes, our Triune God will give what is good. You know in faith – there is no doubt for you that God is the one who brought you this far in your life. And therefore you absolutely believe He will never let you go moving forward...right? Right? But here’s the deal, we still need guidance and governing. But for us, even a brilliant Nehemiah is not what we need to guide our steps; to bring order to our day’s work.
 - ➔ In fact, we need much more than a mere human leader. We need a brilliant Messiah to pay for; to remove and to save us from all of our sins.
- ✘ “Yes,” as verse 12 says, “Yahweh will give (you) what is good.” And so tonight, in this season of Advent, we are gathered to recall the greatest good that Yahweh our God has ever given – the gift of Himself; as verse 11 says, God’s “righteousness looks down from the sky”. In fact the Father’s voice from heaven proclaimed at Jesus’ baptism, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Mat. 3:17).
 - ➔ Our Psalm tonight foreshadowed and points us all to Jesus and His coming from heaven according to verse 10 as the place where God’s “steadfast love and faithfulness meet” for all the earth in the miracle of Immanuel; “God with us” in human flesh. He is so much better than a rebuilt building or a city wall; even better than a rebuilt temple; greater than the first or any earthly temple of stone; Jesus is God’s flesh-and-blood presence, born to us and for us, as one of us – yet without even one molecule of sin in His entire being.
 - ➔ Yes, Jesus – the promised Christ comes to revive our dead, sinful flesh with His perfect flesh. The angels sing; the shepherds worship with awestruck wonder, and Mary treasures up all these things in her heart.
- ✘ And oh my, does a difficult and dirty job lay ahead of this baby in the manger; nothing that Mike Rowe or any other human being could ever face. The cost of His dirty job is one that we Christians all know too well, but will never be able to fully grasp – thorns and nails, a whip and a spear. Only the brilliant God-man, Jesus, can and will and forever does overcome the bars of death and hell – for me and for you!
 - ➔ His righteousness goes before you; His nail-pierced footsteps have forged and laid out the one and only way back to the Father. His gifts are water and Word; bread and wine to bring you home to God in peace; to strengthen you for the difficult task ahead so that you can endure the taunting and tormenting of so many enemies on every side in this earthly life.
- ✘ Just as Yahweh faithfully revived the nation of Judah, so you and I can rest assured that He will revive us by His incarnation in Jesus and His Holy Spirit living inside of us in our Baptism.
 - ➔ It is in Jesus, my fellow believers that the words of the psalmist in verse 13 come to life in your life today and for all of eternity: “Righteousness will go before Him and make His footsteps a way.” Amen.