

Fourth Sunday in Advent – Psalm Series #4

December 20, 2015

The LORD Showed Favor to His Land

Psalm 85

Rev. George Ferch

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

How do you react when someone asks, “Will you do me a favor?” A favor is something the person has not earned, maybe does not even deserve. We say yes for no other reason than out of the goodness of our hearts. That is exactly what the Benediction indicates: “The Lord look on you with his favor, and give you peace.”

God did us an eternal favor when he sent Jesus, his eternal Son into the world. Our Father did this only out of the goodness of his heart. The angels proclaimed this favor, “On earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” Such favor is also very personal. Gabriel told Mary, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.”

Psalm 85 shows that the believers in the Old Testament era were well familiar with God’s favor. I pray that our Advent psalm series has made this abundantly clear. Speaking of that favor, Psalm 85 declares **The LORD Showed Favor to His Land**. In the past with goodness; in their present distress; in the future with hope.

Both testaments relate histories of the repetitive actions by God’s people and by God; the people sin, God showed his favor. They foolishly turn away from God and his Word. God continually turned to them in forgiveness and redemption in the gospel of Christ.

This pattern of repetition is the history of our past, is it not? We sinned daily, God daily showed his favor. We foolishly disregarded the Word. God continually did us a favor and did not keep a record of our sins for Jesus’ sake. My past is littered with the bodies of all my sins but the Father has covered those bodies with Christ’s blood. As we prepare our hearts in repentance over past sins we say, “You showed favor to your land, O LORD;...You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins.”

God doing this favor continues in our present distress. Israel had brought trouble on itself through sin. That is what sin always does, causes distress. The LORD also puts crosses of on us that distress us. A friend of mine just found out he has a cancerous tumor in his colon. Think of the loved one taken away in death suddenly and unexpectedly. There might be a grave financial loss. I might have to suffer sleepless nights because of the sins of another.

Whatever our attendant circumstances, Satan will try to use them to make us think God has stopped being favorable toward us. This is a great lie. We may ask with the psalmist in words not included in our sung version of the psalm, “Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations? Will you not revive us again that your people may rejoice in you?”

No, “God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness,” the writer to the Hebrews says. As difficult as it is to see under those crosses, God still is doing us a favor. Those crosses move us into the Word of God. The gospel of God’s favor in Christ strengthens our weak knees on which we rest in prayer. Our crosses keep us close to Christ’s cross so we do not lose its benefits of the forgiveness of sins, new spiritual life, and eternal salvation in heaven.

How do I know God is always favorable to me? “Today in the town of David a Savior is born to you. He is Christ the Lord.” That favor leads us in the future with hope.

These words rely on God’s favor, “Show us your unflinching love, O LORD, and grant to us your salvation.” The sons of Korah under inspiration saw the Messianic age in which we live. We

have seen God's unfailing love and his salvation in Jesus Christ; the baby in Bethlehem, under the knife of circumcision, baptized in the Jordan, nailed to the cross, standing outside the empty tomb and ascending into heaven where he prepares his return.

Their future is our present. We are living their hope. We await the blessed deliverance they already enjoy at God's right hand. "Love and faithfulness meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other." This poetic picture describes the spiritual perfection of the kingdom of God in our hearts and the kingdom of glory in our futures.

We the church bear Christ's righteousness through faith just as those members of the church did six centuries before our Savior's nativity. Immanuel came in humility and lives in glory. God calls us to live in the humility of repentance and live in the glory of his favor by the gospel.

Thursday is the end of Advent. We will light the white Christ candle in the middle of our Advent wreath with the others. Those four Advent candles promised Jesus was coming, the Christ candle that he is come.

Next time you ask, "Lord, do me a favor?" Remember, he has. He is. He will. Amen. <SDG>