

Sunday 9th August 2020

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PRAYER OF THE DAY

Son of God, you walk on the waters of turmoil
to meet us in the midst of your purposed
journey for our lives.

Help us to recognize your presence,
remember your promise,
rely on your power, and receive your peace
through every storm. **Amen.**

Psalm 85

¹LORD, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

²You forgave the iniquity of your people; you pardoned all their sin. Selah

³You withdrew all your wrath; you turned from your hot anger.

⁴Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us.

⁵Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations?

⁶Will you not revive us again, so that your people may rejoice in you?

⁷Show us your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation.

⁸Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.

⁹Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

¹⁰Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

¹¹Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.

¹²The LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.

¹³Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.

CALL TO CONFESSION

Let us confess our sins
to the Lord of all,
who is generous to all who call upon him.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord Jesus, we call upon you. Save us!
We are intimidated by our circumstances,
distracted from your purposes,
drowning in doubts and fears.
We are presumptuous about your will,
belittling others and magnifying ourselves.
We envy the blessings of others,

secretly despising their dreams.
We have hardened our hearts
to the suffering of our brothers and sisters,
feeding ourselves in face of the injustice
that holds them captive. ;

Lord Jesus, who searches our hearts,
lift us from sin and help us to walk with you
in faith, humility, and brotherly-sisterly love.
Amen.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Our God sees all, knows all, forgives all,
restores all
through our Lord Jesus Christ.

No one who believes in him will be put to shame,
for everyone who calls on the name
of the Lord shall be saved.

1 Kings 19:9-18

⁹At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁰He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." ¹¹He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; ¹²and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁴He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." ¹⁵Then the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. ¹⁶Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. ¹⁷Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill. ¹⁸Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

*God of our present trouble and
promised triumph,
Open our eyes to see you in the*

*midst of our struggles.
Open our ears to hear your words of
invitation and assurance.
Open our minds to recall your wonderful
works and miracles.
Open our hearts to glory in your name
and seek strength in your Word;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.***

The explosion that devastated a large part of Beirut this week, piled suffering upon suffering for a city that has seen more than its share of violence, destruction and bloodshed in recent decades. The devastation of homes and business, of infrastructure and livelihoods, brought yet more grief to a country already on the brink of social and economic collapse, and in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, destroyed vital healthcare facilities and medical staff.

We may think we have been suffering hardship, during our own experience of the pandemic, and may at times worry about the state of our government and nation; but our difficulties, our losses, over these past months should be seen in comparison with what the people of Lebanon have endured, are enduring, and must endure in the days, weeks and years to come.

Cries of anguish at a sense of betrayal by their leaders; of abandonment, when it seems no one cares, of grief, at the deaths of loved ones. These are all too common in the world, in too many places, and all too often without hope of help or healing. For those caught up in such events, it must seem that God, if they believe in God – must be far distant from their suffering.

We hear that note of anguish and abandonment when Elijah cries out in accusation to God when God asks him ‘what are you doing here?’ ‘I alone am left’ is Elijah’s response. He alone of all the prophets of God has survived Queen Jezebel’s hatred and persecution; he has been, he says, zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. He has done everything God required of him, and now he is paying the price, having fled into the desert to hide, fearful for his own life.

Where is God, for Elijah, in this moment of despair? Where is God, in all the times when people feel hopeless in the face of disaster, tragedy, and loss? Elijah's experience is not unique; he is neither the first nor is he the last to wonder, where is God when you really need him?

Through this wilderness experience, through the depths of despair, God comes to Elijah, in a way the prophet might never have expected. Not in a mighty wind, not in terrifying earthquake, nor in roaring fire, but in the sheer silence that follows, God is present.

The voice of God for Elijah is the still small voice that speaks in the calm after the storm has passed; God is known not in spectacular displays of power, but in silence. We live in a world that is filled with noise, from the moment we wake up in the morning until the moment we fall asleep at night. We find it difficult to find time in busy lives for quiet moments – yet it is most clearly in the quiet times, when we stop and listen, that we hear God speaking to our hearts – just as Elijah did. God often speaks, but we too often fail to listen.

Elijah felt abandoned, betrayed, and fled for his life. Yet God proved faithful his time of greatest need. In the midst of suffering, in the midst of fear, God is still present, God is still speaking.

From this story, we should be ready to acknowledge that even in the worst of times, and most terrible of situations, God is not absent, but always present, in our suffering, in the brokenness of our world, God comes to those who lives are torn apart. To those who long for justice, and freedom from persecution, whose greatest desire is an end to war and for peace to reign, God comes.

And to them, and to us, as to Elijah in ancient times, God asks 'what are you doing here?' and what God means is, why despair, why give up, why lose hope, why hide from the difficulties and dangers of the world, why think that you can do nothing to change the world? When God comes in sheer silence, and asks the question of Elijah the second time, Elijah knows what he must do: return to face the dangers that await him, challenge the evil

that Jezebel is doing, and restore Israel to the worship of God, that the people might be free from persecution, and live and prosper once again.

In this is our hope, and the hope of the people of Beirut and of Lebanon, and of the world, that with God's help, we are sent to liberate, to heal, to restore and to rebuild, all we fear we have lost, but will yet find again.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Let us pray for the needs of the world, saying,
Save us, O Lord, we come to you.

God of favor and purpose,
You have clothed us with a robe
of righteousness.
You have directed us to our destiny.
You are with us in our deepest pain,
fear, and bewilderment. ;
You hear our cry when others turn
a deaf ear and a cold heart.
You lift us from the depths
of discouragement
and walk with us over the troubled
waters of life.

We come to you now with confidence
on behalf of the church, the world,
and all in need:
Save us, O Lord, **we come to you.**

For the family of God, our sisters and brothers
who belong to you throughout the world.
Save us, O Lord, **we come to you.**

For your church to fulfill its mission in the world,
showing mercy, proclaiming your good news.
Save us, O Lord, **we come to you.**

For peace and order to permeate your creation,

responding to your commands.
Save us, O Lord, **we come to you.**

For reconciliation among families, factions,
and nations
living in envy and conflict.
Save us, O Lord, **we come to you.**

For those betrayed, beaten, thrown down,
or abandoned,
those in bondage, fear, or distress.
Save us, O Lord, **we come to you.**

For the special needs of those whose names
we remember now...
Save us, O Lord, **we come to you.**

For those who have crossed before us to the
other side of life's lake.
Save us, O Lord, **we come to you.**

Clothe us with your favor and love;
inspire us with dreams from you.
Hold us up when we falter in the storm,
and bring us safely to your promised place
of rest and release.
We pray it all in Jesus' name. **Amen.**