*DEVOTIONS*

January 30 – February 4

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*

**Monday, January 30 Psalm 42:1-6**

*“My soul thirsts for God”*

 The psalm pictures someone far away from Jerusalem and unable to get there. Maybe literally the location is in the far north of the country. The foothills of Mount Hermon where the waters of the Jordan burst from the mountain, the region known as Caesarea Philippi in the New Testament, is as far away from Jerusalem in Israel as you can get. The bursting of the waters from the mountain provides an image for the way things can overwhelm us. They are like huge waves crashing over us. But, they are God’s waves which in the end is good news for it means that they are under God’s control.

 The psalmist uses the image of thirst to illustrate his need for God. Given that the human body cannot live without water, he is not just speaking of a desire for God but of a deep need to be with God. For the psalmist, God is a necessity of life. Augustine put it this way: “The thought of God stirs the human being so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you.”

*My life depends on you, Lord, so I need to be close to you. Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 31 Isaiah 55:1-2**

*“Come, all you who are thirsty”*

 In the previous chapter, Isaiah has announced that God forgives. Now he presents the invitation for all to come and experience that forgiveness. Everything has been done, the tables are set, and all is in readiness. Isaiah expresses the invitation to those who have no resources in themselves using imagery of coming to water and drinking, and coming to food and receiving even though they have no money of their own with which to pay. How tragic it would be if those who are invited fail to come.

 The problem is that we want to decide what is right and wrong for ourselves. We do not wish to be told by our God that something is wrong for us when everything appears so delightful. Neither do we wish to be told that something is good for us when it looks as though it is going to take a lot of effort and may actually bring us some pain. We want to hold the place of God in our lives and have God serve us, supplying our needs as we dictate. But faith always involves doing things God’s way, and seeking his forgiveness when we have done it our way instead.

*I surrender my will to yours, Lord, and seek forgiveness for my sin. Amen.*

**Wednesday, February 1 Micah 6:6-8**

*“What does the Lord require? To act justly . . .”*

 The questions in verses 6-7 are rhetorical statements in which the people are trying to defend themselves against the charge that they have been unfaithful to God. What have they done that God should find fault? They do not know what more they can do to please him. Does God just want more burnt offerings? But something seems out of line with these questions. They focus on excessive giving, as if God is primarily interested in the size or cost of their gifts. They have forgotten that a sacrifice is to be an outward sign of the inner attitude of a person’s broken and contrite heart in light of their sin against God and others.

 The answer to the people’s questions is based on the reality that God has already communicated what he requires. He wants three basic things, the first of which is “to act justly” toward others. God desires his people to demonstrate mutual respect for one another within the community of faith, and “acting justly” describes right social relationships between people based on God’s view of what is appropriate.

*I commit, Lord, to acting justly in my relationships with others. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONS*

January 30 – February 4

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*

**Thursday, February 2 Luke 11:37-42**

*“You neglect justice and the love of God”*

 Jesus is having dinner with a Pharisee, a representative of the legalist faction within Judaism, when he is called to task for sitting down to eat without the ritual washing. In fact, ritual washing was not part of the law at that time. Rather, it was a tradition that the Pharisees observed in order to make themselves feel more righteous than ordinary people. In using the analogy of the cup, Jesus is saying that they are more concerned about appearance than substance.

 To paraphrase Jesus’ reaction somewhat, he is saying, “What do you think you are doing? You have taken the joy of living as God’s chosen people and made it a misery. Because of your many rules, you have made the practice of loving God burdensome. Instead of sharing with joy the material blessings God has given you, you’ve made it a ridiculous game – counting every little herb in your garden so you can accurately figure out your tithe down to the least thing you have. But, being so concerned with your tithing rules, you have neglected justice toward others and true love of God.”

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, so I may be outwardly clean. Amen.*

**Friday, February 3 Luke 18:1-8**

*“God will surely give justice to his chosen people”*

 Jesus’ parable features two characters. The widow represents a helpless person, whose only appeal for justice comes from the authority of the judge. The judge who does not fear God or respect people represents the response to the cry for justice. For some time the judge does not act, but he eventually relents. Her persistence wears him down. Jesus then makes the point that if an unrighteous, secular judge will finally hear your appeal, how much more will your appeal be heard by your heavenly Father, who loves you and cares about you.

 Though the struggle of this life is sometimes hard and even unfair to Christians as they seek to honor God in a world that often does not honor God, we must not lose heart. Sometimes the persecution or the rejection can make us wonder if it is worth it. Other times we become frustrated because those unfaithful to God look as if they have everything. But we must remember that such a life is the “full payment” they get for their choice to pursue riches on this earth. There will come a time when that cupboard is bare.

*I will persist in prayer, Lord, because you hear and answer me. Amen.*

**Saturday, February 4 Matthew 5:1-10**

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness”*

We understand hunger and thirst quite well, for we have all experienced it, though quite moderately compared with many people in this world. The Bible suggests that hunger and thirst are good gifts from God that sustain life. A sure sign that one is dying is the loss of appetite and inability to drink water. As with physical life, so it is with spiritual life. Our hunger and thirst for God, for his righteousness, is essential for our spiritual health. If there is no hunger or thirst for righteousness, indications are that we are spiritually dead, or at least gravely sick.

 The kind of righteousness Jesus is speaking of has three aspects: salvific, moral, and social. First, to be saved means to be made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ. This form of righteousness is something only God can accomplish. Second, moral righteousness is personal character and conduct that pleases God. It refers to an inner righteousness of heart, mind, and motive. Third, social righteousness is concerned with seeking the wellbeing of others. It means to advocate justice for others when it is in our power to do so.

*Teach me your right way of living, Father, that I may be like your Son. Amen.*