

All Saints' Sunday
November 6, 2011
Psalm 34

There are so many stories that will be told about this past week – the freak October snowstorm and its aftermath of further tree damage and power outages. As I walked Logan around the Westville Dam area last week, I could almost hear the trees weeping because of their broken branches.

I dare say, when Teddy DeMings asks about his baptism day sometime in the future, Eileen and Dave, Lynda and Ken will be sure to include their family story of being without power the week before. God put on quite a show of power as a run-up to Teddy's baptismal birthday.

As I was meditating on the sacrament of baptism, Psalm 34 and All Saints Sunday, the question I ask the parents and Godparents highlighted itself.

Will you be responsible for seeing that the child you present is brought up in the Christian faith and life? (BCP, 302)

That is such an important question. The stakes for our children have never been higher.

Psalm 34 speaks to the question of life. "Which of you desire life?" "What is life?" "How do we attain life?" If we can obtain some clarity around these questions for ourselves, that will certainly show us a path to follow ourselves. That clarity will put us in a good position to guide those children God has gifted us with – whether they be our own children, Godchildren, grandchildren, parish children.

The Christian path of "life" is certainly not the only version available – not by any stretch of the imagination. Millions of advertising dollars are spent every day to try and convince us that life does consist in the abundance of possessions. I saw Christmas advertising well before Halloween this year. Parents are under tremendous pressure every year to buy, buy, and buy.

Listen to the question that Psalm 34 poses apropos "life."

12 Who among you loves life *
and desires long life to enjoy prosperity?

The psalmist's answer is:

11 Come, children, and listen to me; *
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

Our psalmist teaches us that real, authentic life begins with the fear of God. The verb 'fear' could mean "shaking in one's boots, terrified," but more often biblical 'fear' means: "reverence for, trust in and dependence upon."

Our psalmist tells us that life is a gift from God for which God makes gracious provision.

- 8 Taste and see that the LORD is good; *
happy are they who trust in him!
- 9 Fear the LORD, you that are his saints, *
for those who fear him lack nothing.

What our culture teaches us fosters greed – buy, buy and buy – knock down those barns and build bigger ones to hold all of our stuff. What Psalm 34 teaches us fosters gratitude.

- 1 I will bless the LORD at all times; *
his praise shall ever be in my mouth.
- 2 I will glory in the LORD; *
let the humble hear and rejoice.
- 3 Proclaim with me the greatness of the LORD; *
let us exalt his Name together.

If life is defined the way our culture defines it, there is no allowance for suffering or for any comprehension of the dilemma of the human condition. The ‘dilemma of the human condition’ is the only time that my non-Christian friends turn to me. They rarely have an answer to the disasters that happen. Catastrophe and death often open the door a crack as to what I, as a Christian have to say. It’s an opportunity not to be missed. Verses 17-18-19 are very informative.

- 17 The righteous cry, and the LORD hears them *
and delivers them from all their troubles.
- 18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted *
and will save those whose spirits are crushed.
- 19 Many are the troubles of the righteous, *
but the LORD will deliver him out of them all.

By using the descriptive “the righteous” the psalmist is alerting us to the fact that it is not enough simply to be the needy who cry to the Lord when they are in trouble. It is the God-fearers who have already made that Lord the basis and guide for the conduct of life around whom the angel of the Lord sets up a protecting camp.

- 7 The angel of the LORD encompasses those who fear him, *
and he will deliver them.

As those who have “reverence for, trust in and depend upon” God, we ask God to help us to grow into righteous behavior.

- 13 Keep your tongue from evil-speaking *

and your lips from lying words.

14 Turn from evil and do good; *
seek peace and pursue it.

Seeking the Lord's help is not separated from loving good, hating evil, and seeking peace. But the bottom line, the real deal is that those who have learned the fear of the Lord are not exempt from overwhelming troubles.

Baptism and a growing, maturing life of faith, trust and dependence on Jesus is not an insurance policy for this life. The daily walk of faith is a "design for living" (in 12-step lingo) that really works in the best of time and in the worst of times. God has promised to be with us in our tough times. In Paul's words: nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:38)."

With all of this in mind, the second question I direct to the parents and Godparents is: *Will you by your prayers and witness help this child to grow into the full stature of Christ?*

Never underestimate the power of prayer for another. It is our powerful resource especially when offered for another. Prayer changes things.

And finally, as we all know only too well, our actions, our witness speak far more loudly than our words. Our children, friends, family members and strangers will be powerfully drawn to Christ as they see Christ working in and through us.

My prayer for all of us as beloved baptized ones, parents and godparents is that as we hear these promises made once again on All Saints Sunday – surrounded as we surely are by an invisible 'cloud of witnesses' – that the Holy Spirit touches each one of us anew to renew the commitments we make each time we witness a baptism. May it be so, Amen.