

Proper 23, Year A  
October 9, 2011  
**Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23**

In the words of our collect this morning, “we [do earnestly] pray that your [God’s] grace may always precede and follow us.” Otherwise, we truly will “err and stray from thy ways like lost sheep (BCP, 41)” in the words of the confession from Morning Prayer I.

The portions from Psalm 106 that we read this morning give us a rather clear picture of ourselves left to our own desires and devices.

Psalm 105 and 106 are a matched set. I had four different opportunities to preach on Psalm 105 this past July and August. You possibly recall that I related God’s “wonderful works” in the history of Israel from the original call of Abraham to God’s powerful work of salvation at the freeing of the Hebrew slaves in the Exodus. We, in turn, were able to look back with gratitude at how God provided for the founding and early history of Holy Trinity Church. So together with the psalmist and the Israelites, we can affirm ...

*Hallelujah! Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,  
for his mercy endures forever. (1)*

These are examples of how God’s grace precedes our actions. Would that we would choose to stay in that place of gratitude and obedience. On our dog walk with Logan yesterday around the Westville Dam area, Ray and I read about the crucial importance that “available, visible daily practice, constituted and undertaken humanly, implements the defining linkages between Yahweh [God] and Israel [church].” Daily disciplines of prayer, Scripture reading and reflection go a long way to keeping us moving forward on that Royal Highway. Over the long run, many of us have found Forward Day by Day and/or The Journey to be a wonderful spiritual tool especially if shared regularly with a friend. I have found that left to my own self, often these spiritual practices fade away over time with the fading away of a daily connection with God – from our side of the equation. We all too easily move into the next part of our human pattern.

*We have sinned as our forebears did;  
we have done wrong and dealt wickedly. (6)*

The one example that was picked up in our Psalm mirrored our Old Testament lesson.

*And so they exchanged their Glory  
for the image of an ox that feeds on grass. (20)*

The Apostle Paul picks up on this Psalm verse in Romans, chapter 1. The section heading in Peterson’s The Message reads ... “Ignoring God Leads to a Downward Spiral.”

*<sup>18-23</sup>But God's angry displeasure erupts as acts of human mistrust and wrongdoing and lying accumulate, as people try to put a shroud over truth. But the basic reality of God is plain enough. Open your eyes and there it is! By taking a long and thoughtful look at*

*what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes as such can't see: eternal power, for instance, and the mystery of his divine being. So nobody has a good excuse. What happened was this: People knew God perfectly well, but when they didn't treat him like God, refusing to worship him, they trivialized themselves into silliness and confusion so that there was neither sense nor direction left in their lives. They pretended to know it all, but were illiterate regarding life. They traded the glory of God who holds the whole world in his hands for cheap figurines you can buy at any roadside stand.*

The freed Hebrew slaves got really scared when “Moses delayed to come down from the mountain.” They took the jewelry the Egyptians gave them as they left Egypt and instructed Aaron, Moses’ brother (no less) to make a god for them that would give them a sense of security.

Before we laugh at that silliness, we as individuals and a parish need to take a good hard look at what we grab onto when we’re feeling “restless, irritable and discontent.” I dare say, we all have our favorite, homemade idols that seem to give us “ease and comfort” for awhile.

Money – cold, hard cash – has got to rank relatively high as a favorite idol. I know, historically, just before my call to serve this parish, there were some pretty good fights over the use of parish endowment money. It always amazes me how much heat and light is produced over the use of someone else’s money that was left to the church.

I think I’ve mentioned other nominees for favorite idol before. What or who do you place before Jesus and His call on your life? Family, sports, health, self-worth?

*<sup>24-25</sup>So God said, in effect, "If that's what you want, that's what you get." It wasn't long before they were living in a pigpen, smeared with filth, filthy inside and out. And all this because they traded the true God for a fake god, and worshiped the god they made instead of the God who made them—the God we bless, the God who blesses us.*

And so as we travel further and further from God’s Royal Highway, verse 23 says ...

*So he [God] would have destroyed them.*

God’s displeasure at our idol-making activity is described in terms of a “consuming wrath.” That should not surprise us.

But it is exactly here that the Psalm has an important understanding of how God’s just wrath is restrained from the destruction of His people. Deliverance from punishment does not come automatically. When Israel herself rejected God’s name and power by idolatry, only the intercession of Moses turned away God’s righteous anger. This Psalm give the office of the intercessor a significant place in God’s relation to His sinful people.

And so Moses points the way through the centuries to our all-sufficient Intercessor Jesus Christ.

But how long will we continue to lean on/rely on our fake idols and be left in that dark place of fear and despair before we realize our need for Jesus, our Intercessor who is our only hope? How long?

So let me end with the prayer found in verse 4 ...

*Remember me, O Lord, with the favor you have for your people,  
and visit me with your saving help.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one  
God, now and forever.*