

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Psalm 6 is the basis for our meditation this day with a specific emphasis on verses 6 and 9:

- **“I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping.” (Ps 6:6)**
- **“The LORD has heard my plea; the LORD accepts my prayer. “ (Ps 6:9)**

Thus far the Word of the Lord...

What is Vicar doing? Preaching on random Psalms? No, it was not a random decision to preach on Psalm 32 last week. I could have begun with Psalm 6 last Wednesday (the Psalm I'm preaching on this day). But it seemed fitting to begin with Psalm 32 as that was the designated Psalm of the Day for this past Sunday, Lent 1. Now what do Psalm 6 and Psalm 32 have in common? If you were to turn to page 292 in your hymnal, that is the rite of Individual or Private Confession and Absolution, you would see. The seven Psalms printed on page 292 are known as 'penitential Psalms' because they focus on the repentance of the sinner. These psalms were especially used during the penitential season of Lent. Thus we will be using these Psalms as the basis for our midweek Lenten meditations. Two short weeks ago, Ash Wednesday began the penitential season of Lent: forty days of reflection and sorrow over our sin and its consequences - Jesus' suffering and death on the cross.

What does it mean to be penitent? I'm not sure I addressed this particular question last week, and it is an important question which every Christian should be equipped to answer, so let us address it today. What is it to be penitent? First, penitence is despair or sorrow over sin, also known as contrition. And second, penitence is trust in God's deliverance - that's faith! Without a doubt, Psalm 6 demonstrates these two essential aspects of true repentance!

Psalm 6 is attributed to King David. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David demonstrates his sorrow over sin by the grief he expresses in this psalm. He is suffering greatly, and his suffering is a consequence of his sin. Yet suffering is not the only consequence of sin. The Israelites would have been well acquainted with the bloody sacrifices required to make atonement for their sins. They would have experienced firsthand the truth that sin results in death. As **Hebrews 9:22** affirms - **“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”** Sin is a serious business.

All trials and afflictions that we face in life are consequences of sin. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, the result was sorrow and suffering not only for human beings but also for all of creation (Rom 8:22). Trials and afflictions disrupt our lives, bringing us great torment. Whether this is sickness, injury, the loss of a loved one, or conflicts with others, the consequence of sin brings sorrow, grief, pain, anxiety, anguish, and despair in our lives. As was true for David, there are times when we languish and our bones are troubled (Ps 6:2), when our soul is greatly sorrowful (Ps 6:3), when we're weary with moaning, when tears and weeping pour forth (Ps 6:6), when our eyes waste away and we grow weak (Ps 6:7). Finally, this anguish ends in death, the ultimate consequence of sin: **“For the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23)**. Like David, we can't help but wonder where God is and what His intentions are throughout all the troubles we face: **“O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath” (Ps 6:1)**. We wonder “how long” God will allow us to suffer so (Ps 6:3).

The contrite man knows that he has sinned, he is afraid of God, and flees. This is to experience contrition, which is not our work, but the work of God's Law. He has sorrow over his sin, for he cannot bear God's judgment and wrath. Think of Adam and Eve. They ate of the tree which God had commanded them not to, their eyes were opened, and they hid from God. They experienced

contrition. Think of Judas. After he betrayed Jesus into the hands of the Pharisees he experienced something very similar to that which is described in Psalm 6. He knew that he had sinned and he was driven to great despair. He experienced contrition. Yet, he lacked the second aspect of true repentance - faith.

The Law is good. Through it God leads us to contrition, which in turn drives us back to God! But without faith, we would remain in the depths of despair. Contrition and faith go hand in hand.

Martin Luther says it far better than I ever could. He describes the blessed comfort that God's rebuke provides:

“In order that God might dispense His strength and consolation and communicate it to us, He withdraws all other consolation and makes the soul deeply sorrowful, crying and longing for His comfort. Thus, all God's chastisements are graciously designed to be a blessed comfort” (AE 14:142).

You see, trials and afflictions are intended by God to turn us toward Him. Trials (Luther referred to them as *Anfechtungen*) from God are intended to break down our self-confidence and reduce us to a state of doubt and despair in order that we might finally turn to God for aid. When God told Adam and Eve about the suffering they would face as a result of their rebellion, it was not done out of spite or revenge, but rather out of His love for them. In all trials and afflictions, we must turn first to God. During this life, all trials and afflictions we face are from God as a kind Father, intended to turn us toward Him. When we face such afflictions, we may fear that they come from God as if from a stern Judge, an eternal punishment meant to drive us away. That is what Adam and Eve thought after they had first sinned. Feeling shame, they hid themselves. Yet God, in love, came searching for them. God's eternal judgment comes only if and when we reject His grace. As truly penitent people, like David, we pray that God's afflictions and discipline are not done in anger or wrath, but rather in love and mercy.

David says, **“Depart from me, all you workers of evil” (Ps 6:8)**. On the Last Day, our Lord Jesus Christ will quote these words of David to those who boast of their own deeds, deeds they supposedly did in Jesus’ name (Matt 7:23) but deeds not done in penitent faith.

There is no boasting before God. For the penitent person, recognizing sin means recognizing our unworthiness. Luther writes:

“This psalm and others like it will never be thoroughly understood or prayed unless disaster stares man in the face as it does in death. . . . When man thus declines and becomes as nothing in all his power, works, and being, until there is nothing but a lost, condemned and forsaken sinner, then divine help and strength appear” (AE 14:141).

When we are in the deepest, darkest depths of woe, there is only one direction to turn - to the Author and Perfector of our faith, who intercedes on our behalf.

God’s deliverance is based solely on His grace and mercy. This grace and mercy came to Adam and Eve when God promised one from the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent. This grace and mercy came to Abraham when God promised that from his offspring all the nations of the world would be blessed. This promise came to David when God said that from his offspring would come One who would sit on an eternal throne. This promise came through Isaiah, who said that the Lord’s Suffering Servant would be despised and rejected, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He would even bear our grief and carry our sorrows. God’s deliverance centers in Christ Jesus, who underwent all afflictions and trials for us.

Consider the sorrow Jesus faced in the Garden of Gethsemane, where he felt the full weight of the sins of the world, where Jesus sweated great drops of blood, where Jesus was abandoned by even his closest friends. Consider the suffering Jesus faced before the Sanhedrin and before Pilate, where he was mocked, spit upon, beaten, and scourged mercilessly. Consider the anguish and death that

Jesus faced on the cross of Calvary, where he was not only slowly tortured until He breathed His last breath, but where He was also forsaken by God the Father as He carried our sins and bore the judgment that we deserved. And He did that for you! He did that for me! He did that for all people!

Because of Jesus, the Lord hears the sound of our penitent weeping. Because of Jesus, the Lord hears our plea and accepts our prayer. In Jesus' perfect life, suffering, death, and resurrection, God shows His steadfast love for us. We have a gracious God who is not unacquainted with our suffering. He has suffered all that and so much more for us. He did it to deliver us from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

Repentance includes trust/faith in God's grace through Christ Jesus—and in God's grace alone. We can do nothing before God but acknowledge our wretched sinfulness. And by God's grace, the Holy Spirit works penitent faith in us. The Spirit works through Baptism, through the Gospel message of Christ, including the word of Absolution, and through our Lord's Supper. He works to bring us to faith in Christ, trusting in God's grace and mercy, convincing us that through Christ, our sins are forgiven and we are indeed at peace with God.

And so, Psalm 6 shows us not only, first, that the penitent grieves over sin, but also, second, that the penitent trusts in God's gracious deliverance through faith in Jesus Christ: **“The Lord has heard my plea; the Lord accepts my prayer” (Ps 6:9)**

This Lenten journey is made with faith in God's boundless mercy through Jesus Christ, who suffered all for us. The penitent, therefore, confidently trust in God's deliverance through the cross of Christ. Throughout our midweek Lenten meditations, as we consider these Penitential Psalms, I pray

that our penitence grows, even as our confident faith in Jesus Christ, our merciful Savior, grows. And so, in Jesus' precious name we pray in penitent faith. Amen.

The peace which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.