

Psalm 67

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A psalm. A song.

¹ May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, Selah

² that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.

³ May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.

*⁴ May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly
and guide the nations of the earth. Selah*

⁵ May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.

⁶ Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us.

⁷ God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him.

Did you watch the NFL draft this weekend? A lot of people did. Even though it was far from the spectacle it usually is, people tuned in. I suppose fans were looking for some semblance of live sports excitement, tuned in to watch in record number. More than 8 million tuned in to watch even the second day of the draft. For many, there was this sudden influx of what seemed like hope, at least for a night or two, where each team had a chance to make an impact. Could this pick be a bust, a break-even player, or the player the one that gets your team to the next level? And of course, after all that speculation, we are still left to wonder, will the season even be played? We can wonder, we can wish, we can dream, and we even cling to the sliver of a chance that all of this will work out in the way that we want. But no one knows for sure.

However, one thing looks rather clear, we all crave some semblance of hope.

For the disciples on the road to Emmaus, it seemed like all hope was gone. For them, this wasn't just a lost season or a missed opportunity. This was not a case of, "Oh well we will get them next time around." They were of the opinion that hope had died with Jesus, and now all hope was lost. Their faces were downcast. Their hearts were broken. As they trudged along the only song that they could have sung would have been a depressing dirge.

But then, he showed up. A man they did not recognize pointed them to the Scriptures to see the living and undying hope that God had given to them and all his people since the beginning. The living and enduring hope was alive and well, and he found them, he instructed them, he walked with them. And this is the same hope that God gives to his people today until the end of time. For you see, the hope that God gives is not just wishful thinking, it is not an estimated guess, or positive intuition based on a gut feeling or even careful research. No, the hope that we have in Jesus is unlike any other wishful thinking or positive intuition that this world is familiar with, for the hope that God gives is absolutely rock solid and certain. The hope that God gives is sure and reliable for it comes from our God. Just as the LORD had promised, Jesus lives and because He lives, we too shall live. The one promised to be the serpent crusher, the

soul saver, the sin taker, the Lord our righteousness, he would come just as promised. He would come to give us peace with God. And yes, because Jesus lives God's promises that he will watch over us each and every day and his promise to bring us to our home in heaven, those promises will be perfectly fulfilled according to God's gracious will as well. Yes, Jesus loves you and me, and because he died and rose heaven's gates are open wide. We may be weak, but he is strong. Yes, Jesus loves you and me, and we are so certain that this is true because the Bible tells us so, and the Holy Spirit is working through that Word, reassuring us day after day. His mercies are new every morning.

So this is the confidence that comes from faith in our faithful LORD. Rejoice with me and like the Psalmist let us proclaim with certainty the LORD will bless his people. He will deliver us from evil. He will make his face shine upon us. And he will give us peace.

Rejoice and sing! Your hope is in our God.

Trust the one who is faithful.

Make his name known among the nations.

Maybe life will get back to normal sooner rather than later. That is our wish, but we don't really know, do we? It could be that we are being overcautious, it could be that we are not being cautious enough. Everyone has their own opinion, surely. But it is just that an opinion, a guess, a hunch, even if it is an opinion that is well thought out and backed by research and facts, things could change, things could swing in the other direction. Maybe. We don't know for sure, and that's just one of the things that makes life so strange right now.

In this world of uncertainty that we live in, our God stands as this stunning beacon of light that shines so beautifully in the haze and darkness. As sure as the sun shines its face upon the earth, God's love is faithful. God's love is reliable. God's love warms our hearts and gives us life. Even as the clouds of life surround us, as the light of the sun still shines through on a cloudy day, so the Lord is gracious and merciful to us day after day.

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us,

The psalmist here echoes the words of that special blessing that God had given to Aaron to place upon his people. These are words that we too have come to know well. *The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace.*

The psalmist repeats, or at least harkens back, to this memorable phrasing as he urges God's people praise and to call on the LORD God who is faithful and worthy of his trust, and the psalmist wants you to know that this God is worthy of your trust too. And this was not just the opinion of a biased songwriter, this was backed by experience and history. God who put his name on his people and blessed them was the God who promised deliverance from Egypt and came through. The LORD who promised to bring his people to the Promised Land delivered. And the God who promised to be gracious and merciful and to preserve his people

in their exile, is the same God, the same gracious Lord, who promised a Messiah would come to save the people from their sins. In each and every promise he delivered. We remember how after God's people obtained the land of promise this is what was said of the LORD, ***Not one of all the LORD's good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.*** This is most certainly true still today and it will always be that way.

Our God is the Lord who makes promises and keeps them. He is faithful. Just as the Scriptures had foretold. Starting with the books of Moses, through the Psalms, and the prophets, God had promised how He would provide for his people and provide through his people a Savior who would be a blessing for all nations. And this Savior would bring peace and blessing like no other. Better than the obvious draft pick, better than a prophet with potential, this was God's Son, this was God Himself, and God is faithful. He came to bring us victory over sin and death and hell. We have that victory through his gift of faith, already right now. And our God promises that he will come again to give us the victors crown in heaven when he takes us to be with him. We can trust in our God. We have peace in knowing that our Redeemer lives.

Many people spend much of their lives putting their trust in empty things that will one day leave them disappointed or crushed or simply unsatisfied. "Many people" – well this includes us too. The pressures of daily life lead us to look to things around us so often that we put our hope in these things. But what happens when a storm comes and sweeps our things away? Or a tragedy strikes, an illness, an accident, an injury, even one mistake could change everything. To put our hope, for joy and satisfaction, and meaning and purpose in the fleeting and fading, unreliable and fickle things of this life is not just unwise, it is a recipe for disaster – even worse eternal disaster. Peter would speak to this point in that epistle lesson that we heard read, and how God redeemed us from ***that empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers.*** That life which depends on pleasures, on wealth, and even health, is built on sinking, shifting sand, most certainly. But here is where the words of our Psalm for today proclaim such joy and confidence to sinners who need, who crave such steadfast hope. The Lord has provided salvation. He will watch over us. He will gather us to himself in heaven.

The LORD is faithful. By faith, our trust is placed in our God and we will not be disappointed. No matter what happens in our life our God promises to care for us, watch over us, tend to our needs like a Father and a shepherd, and on the day of his choosing, according to his timing, he will bring us to our home in heaven.

He is the one who looks down and watches over us, and He who watches over the sparrow certainly watches over you. And the LORD Jesus has promised that he will be with us always to the very end of the age. Worry, anxiety, grief, sadness, loneliness, doubt, and fear hide him from our vision and keep us from recognizing his presence, but our Lord comes near with Word and Sacrament to open our eyes again. He comes near through his living and enduring Word that has brought hope to so many through the ages and he comes near to us and restores, he revives, he enlivens our hope, so that we may proclaim his praise and share that hope with others.

And that sure and certain hope is something that the people of this world could certainly use right now. We are not sure of a lot of things right now. There is uncertainty in the world of sports, in health and medicine, in world and local economies, in life in general, but as those who have been called to faith, we know for certain that our God is near. He is watching over us, his face shines upon us, and he has given us a hope and certainty worth sharing so that many more might call on his name, trust in our God, and be saved and kept safe forever by Jesus.

The apostle Peter in one of his epistles encourages believers to always be prepared to give the reason for the hope that you have. Filled with the hope and confidence that God gives us may we look for ways to share the good news of Jesus that holds us fast in good times and bad. And so now in these strange and uncertain times let us look for ways to sow the seed of faith, to share the word of God and the hope that we have made certain in Jesus. Let's look for ways to invite people to hear God's Word. And maybe it is that God has a plan for these strange times. We can probably think of some of those that we might invite to church would have had a hard time walking into a church building, but watching online is something that they might do. It may be a different way than what we are used to, but as we share a link, as we post a bible passage, and we direct people to a website, know that this is a way that we can share the good news of Jesus so that others may know the hope and the certainty and the peace that Christ gives. And so invite, encourage, friends and neighbors, to tune in, and watch online, to listen to the radio, or to watch the WELS pastor on TV. And as we carry out this blessed task of sharing and inviting, we have our eyes set on the harvest.

Yes, many in our area are starting to plant and ready the soil for a crop. What a blessing that God has given to his people of good and favorable weather lately, may the Lord bless this planting season and the harvest to follow. But even better than the harvest we expect to come this fall, will be the most blessed harvest to come at the end of time when God will bring all believers body and soul to himself in heaven. Far from uncertainty and pain and grief and trouble, God has promised that he will bring all believers to himself. We will be with the Lord, and we will see him with our own eyes, how our hearts yearn within us.

Until that time, dear friends, we have hope to share. Better than mere wishful thinking or even unbridled optimism, we have a hope made sure and certain by a God who has through the pages of Scripture who has shown himself to be faithful. We have a Savior who went to the cross for our sins and has risen from death to give us life. And we have a Spirit who creates and strengthens our faith. This is our one true God, and we have been blessed with his Word of truth and his precious promises, and not one of his promises has failed, not one. Know that our God will keep his promise to watch over you. The Lord will bless and keep you. The Lord will make his face shine upon you. The Lord will be gracious to you and give you peace.

Let us praise his holy name, let the nations sing for joy to our God who gives us hope and peace. May his salvation be made known to the ends of the earth. May the nations sing for joy now and always, in the name of our living Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.