

**Sermon for Morning Prayer:
The Third Sunday after the Epiphany**

The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest in Charge

Psalm 43. *Judica me, Deus.*

GIVE sentence with me, O God, and defend my cause against the ungodly people; * O deliver me from the deceitful and wicked man.

For thou art the God of my strength; why hast thou put me from thee? * and why go I so heavily, while the enemy oppresseth me?

O send out thy light and thy truth, that they may lead me, * and bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy dwelling;

And that I may go unto the altar of God, even unto the God of my joy and gladness; * and upon the harp will I give thanks unto thee, O God, my God.

Why art thou so heavy, O my soul? * and why art thou so disquieted within me?

O put thy trust in God; * for I will yet give him thanks, which is the help of my countenance, and my God.

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the eighth Verse of the forty-first Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.¹

“... But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away.

“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. ... When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilder-

ness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together: That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.²

“When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,) He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And he must needs go through Samaria. Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.) Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. The woman saith [SETH] unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

give him thanks, which is the help of my countenance and my God.”

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St. David's Anglican Church
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¹ Isaiah 41: 8-10, 17-29 (KJV).

² St. John 4: 1-14 (KJV).

³ Psalm 43:5-6 (MCV).

Text:

From the Psalm:

Why art thou so heavy, O my soul? * and why art thou so disquieted within me?

O put thy trust in God; * for I will yet give him thanks, which is the help of my countenance, and my God.³

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

The closing verses of Psalm 43, which we read earlier, provide a two step program for overcoming feelings of gloom and self-pity. Such feelings are common even among people of faith. I've had them from time to time. Probably you have as well. They seem to be especially common at this time of year when the days are short and the nights are long and we spend a lot of time cooped up inside.

There are reasons for such feelings, and sometimes those reasons are obvious. I remember a time when Shirley and I decided to visit Atlantic City New Jersey, shortly after that city decided to become the Las Vegas of the East Coast.

We were not interested in gambling, but we used to go there when we were young to enjoy the ocean and the beach and the boardwalk and to listen to the big bands performing on Steele Pier. We were curious to see how the resort had changed since the casinos opened.

We sat on a bench on the boardwalk and watched the people go by. They trudged along slumped over, with sad faces, looking down and straight ahead. They never saw the ocean or us.

We went into one of the casinos and looked around. There were no windows, no clocks, nothing to connect with the world outside. The lights were intense but not bright. There was lots of noise but not much conversation. We thought that Hell must be something like that place. It was not hard to understand why people who had been there and lost all their money were plodding along the boardwalk looking like zombies. But it is not always so easy to understand what is causing what the Psalmist calls heaviness of soul.

It appears that the writer of the 43rd Psalm is among the Jews who were taken captive and carried into a foreign country. He was unable to go to the temple and participate in the sacrifices and enjoy the beauty of the building and the music and the liturgy. But that was not enough to fully explain the depth of his feelings of persecution and abandonment by God. So after he asks why God has abandoned him, he asks himself a better question: “Why art thou so full of heaviness, O my soul, and why art thou in such turmoil within me?”

The psalmist is a wise man, because asking that question is the first step in overcoming feelings of gloom and self-pity.

In my experience as a pastor I have noted three things that seem to cause people to get down on themselves and on God. One is guilt. Another is fear. Another is a sense of inadequacy.

Feelings of guilt are hard to deal with and consequently easy to deny. I’m sure the zombies in Atlantic City had such feelings and brushed them aside, blaming their troubles on the cards or the dice or the machines or the managers of the casinos.

Fear is also easy to brush aside or push down deep, especially for men. Likewise a sense of inadequacy calls up denial mechanisms when it encounters ego. But all of those demons, and there are others as well, have to be faced before they can be dealt with.

So the question must be asked and must be answered honestly. Why are you really so burdened down and why are you really in such a state of inner turmoil?

Once you have looked inside yourself instead of outside, the next step in overcoming gloominess is to fall back on your faith and allow God to catch you.

I once heard of a famous preacher who was worried about his career and about his family and about his church and about the state of the world in general. He felt guilty. He felt fearful. He felt like a failure. He was walking the floor unable to sleep in the wee hours of the morning, when he heard the voice of God. “John”, said the voice, “why don’t you go to bed. I’ll walk the floor for awhile.” So the preacher went to bed and fell into a deep sleep. When he woke up he still had the same problems he had before, but now he had hope. His faith assured him that God was aware of his problems and would help him to solve them in due time.

So it was with the psalmist. As a man of faith he turned his problem over to God and let him do the worrying. “Put thy trust in God,” he said to himself, “for I will yet give him thanks, which is the help of my countenance and my God.”

So it can be with you also when life seems to have gotten you down. Follow the two step program laid out by the psalmist. Have the courage to ask what it is that is really troubling you. Be honest in your analysis. Don’t settle for a recitation of the circumstances under which you are living. And don’t try to blame God or your spouse or your boss or your parents or anybody else. Forget about blame. Look inside. See what is really there. Then dump what you see there in God’s in basket and let him deal with it in his own way and in his own time.

“Why art thou so full of heaviness, O my soul, and why art thou in such turmoil within me? Put thy trust in God, for I will yet