



**St John's United Church of Christ
Pastor's Lenten Devotion / Prayer for
The Fourth Week of Lent
Wednesday, March 17, 2021 7:00 pm**

Greetings St John's Family, Blessings to you on this fourth week of the season of Lent. I love the Psalms. Have you read them? They are poetry with powerful messages that point us towards faith in God in the midst of our imperfect lives with their daily challenges, worries, and temptations.

Listen to our reading from Psalm 107: 1-3, 17-22: ¹O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. ²Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, those he redeemed from trouble ³and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

¹⁷Some were sick through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities endured affliction; ¹⁸they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. ¹⁹Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress; ²⁰he sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction. ²¹Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind.

²²And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of his deeds with songs of joy.

Stephen J. Cole tells the story of a man who was the sole survivor of a shipwreck. He was able to make a raft from some of the ship's cargo and drifted to a deserted island. There he built a makeshift shelter and lived on what little food he had been able to salvage from the wreckage. Time after time he tried in vain to attract the attention of a passing ship. Finally, he saw a ship approaching more closely and hurriedly lit a signal fire. But unfortunately, the ship passed by and was quickly fading from sight.

Accidentally, the flames from the signal fire set the thatched roof of his shelter on fire. The man watched helplessly as all of his provisions burned to ashes. All was lost, he thought. He didn't see how his life could last much longer. But then he noticed that the ship which had passed him by had turned around and was coming back towards the island. He had been seen by the crew and was going to be rescued!

Once on board, he went to the captain to express his thanks. He asked, "What caused you to turn around after you had already gone by me?" The captain answered, "We saw the smoke you made by setting your shelter on fire." The very thing that seemed to seal his doom was the means of his delivery.

A lot of us tend to see our problems like that marooned man. There appears to be no point or purpose in them. They drive us to despair and hopelessness. Sometimes we blame God and grow bitter because He has allowed trials to come into our lives. And yet it's often those very trials that become the means for our growing in grace.

Our problems can bring us to the end of our rope, so to speak, but it's at these times that we are forced to call upon God for help.

Psalm 107 is a series of human trials troubles and tragedies. In each one, the suffering person comes to the end of their rope with nothing more they can do. They call out to God. God hears and answers their prayers. The people respond with gratitude and a renewed desire to share this "good news" with all.

There is hope for us all in the midst of the trials, problems, and challenges you face today. Bring yourself to the Lord. Admit you can't do it anymore by yourself. And then, notice how God is working to bring you through to a better day. Our faith combined with God's power is an unbeatable combination in all aspects of life including the life of our church, ***if*** we put it into practice. Amen.

Let's pray: Dear God, help us to reconnect during this season of lent, with you. You know all of our individual problems, concerns, and pain. We are reminded in Psalm 107, to call out to you call out to you for the wisdom, strength, perseverance that will bring us to hope and healing from all the things that separate us from you. Amen.