

“Hope in the One Who is in Control”

Liturgical Date: Epiphany 5 (B)

Primary Text: Psalm 147:1-11

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, the Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, is the portion of Psalm 147 that we read responsively earlier. The title of the sermon is, “Hope in the One Who is in Control.” **GOD IS ALWAYS IN CONTROL SO THAT HE WILL PRESERVE AND DELIVER HIS CREATION.**

To be in control or “controlling” can be seen as a positive or negative thing. In a negative sense one could think of someone who is overbearing or dictatorial. They don’t really take other people’s opinions into consideration. They rule with an iron fist and only seem to really make decisions that benefit themselves. You may think of someone, maybe a particular boss or leader, that you had over you in your lifetime.

But we do need people who are “in control”. Leaders are given to us by God to keep order in society and get things done that need to be done. There is a certain comfort when someone is in control. Some people seem to thrive on chaos, but most of us want there to be some semblance of order and structure. A good teacher has a structured classroom with students who listen and learn. A star quarterback or point guards leads the offense and their team to victory. A general executes a well-designed battle plan against the enemy. A political leader leads and reassures us when times are tough.

However, as much as some people want to be in control all of the time, this is not humanly possible. The best teacher can have a bad day where the students are unruly. Joe Montana and Michael Jordan were not able to lead comebacks

every time. Napoleon didn't win every battle. Franklin D. Roosevelt could not stop Pearl Harbor from happening. Thus, even strong leaders are limited.

There is one exception, of course. God. God is always in control. Even when it seems like things are spiraling into chaos, God is still in control. We may not see it with our human eyes, but need to be assured with our eyes of faith that God indeed does have a plan and will execute it. We see this clearly in the portion of Psalm 147 that we read today.

The context of Psalm 147 is the second of the five "Hallelujah Psalms." Jerusalem was destroyed and many of God's people carried off into exile because of their disobedience. But now God has restored them. He has brought them back to the land and the temple has been rebuilt, just as He had promised. Verses 2-3, *"The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."* God had not permanently abandoned Jerusalem nor its people. He has restored and delivered His people. More hardships would later come, but hope in God's plan was required. The Messiah, Jesus, was coming and the people would be truly delivered.

God is in control. Things that we humans cannot do, He does. He has created the world with a system of scientific laws that keep the place going. And He can intervene and override those laws when He deems necessary. God has created, determined the number of stars and knows each and every one of them (v 4). This statement is even more incredible today than it was thousands of years ago when God first made it. There are about 1,100 stars that are visible to the human eye, which would have been known to ancient people. Today because of powerful telescopes we know that there are actually billions of stars. God created each one of them and knows each one. Incredible. Verse 5, *"Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure."*

Then in verse 8 we hear that God, “*covers the heavens with clouds; he prepares rain for the earth; he makes the grass grow on the hills.*” When you stare up at the magnificent clouds as they seem to float by and even make interesting shapes that may resemble other things we are in awe and wonder. Grass grows providing not only beauty, but food for many animals, verse 9, “*He gives to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens that cry.*” The rains come, the rains that provide life giving water for all living things on earth. They also provide beautiful waterfalls, lakes, rivers, and even oceans. Yes, scientifically we can learn about the water cycle and the life cycle of plants and animals. Even that we can study this is a gift from God who has given us intelligence. But who set the water cycle into motion? Who created the very elements of life like water. The answer to this is God. God is always in control. God is always providing as a good and gracious father.

For this and much more, He is worthy of our praise, our shouts of Alleluia. As the Psalm began, “*Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting.*” And then verse 7, “*Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre.*” Music. As Luther believed the most beautiful gift from God, only second to theology. The Psalms proclaim that joyous songs should ring out in praise to our great sovereign God.

And this Psalm also tells us what God values. What He desires from His creation, the pinnacle of which is humankind. Verse 6, “*The Lord lifts up the humble; he casts the wicked to the ground.*” This is a principle that we see throughout the Scripture: Law to the proud, grace to the humble. We must cede any desire to be in control to God. Even those in leadership positions need to understand that they ultimately are to serve God and then by extension they serve the people that God has allowed them to lead. When you study the Bible, including the ministry of Jesus we continually see that those who humbled

themselves before God and were ready to be used by Him, submitting to Him were blessed. The arrogant who thought they could do it without God, with only themselves are brought to the ground.

No one is immune. Israel had to learn this the hard way as they constantly disobeyed God. As Romans 3:23 says, “*all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*” And 1 John 1 reminds us that “*if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*” Each and every one of us needs to examine ourselves in light of God’s Holy Law. And when we hold that mirror up to our lives, we are humbled. We realize that we are sinners that deserve nothing good from God. But in His mercy, He shows us grace despite of our sin. We must humble ourselves, submit ourselves to the one who is truly in control.

The strength of the Lord is made perfect in weakness. Verse 10, “*His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man.*” One humorous note on this verse is that when I was at Emmanuel College one of our professors shared that this verse was once used by Holiness Christians to justify a prohibition on men wearing shorts because the Lord take not “pleasure in the legs of man.” In fact, in the 1960s the college wanted to start a basketball team, but the league required the players to wear shorts in games. They could not get an exemption so there was for a time, no basketball team! Now obviously, this text is not speaking a prohibition against wearing shorts. The first part of the verse speaks about the strength of a horse and then carries that forward to the legs of a man as that is what causes a person to be able to move quickly and leverage their strength in moving something. The point is that the power of God created beings, both man and animal is nothing compared to God. We can’t really on human strength to please God or somehow atone for our sins.

That takes God and His plan. That takes Jesus and what He has done for us. Jesus often did not appear strong, did He? A baby in Bethlehem whose parents

had to take Him and flee from murderous Herod. Not a rich man, but a “regular joe” son of a small-town carpenter. And arrested as a criminal and dying as a criminal on a cross. That did not look strong. It looked weak. But God was in control. What appeared as weakness, was strength. Death could not hold Him, and the tomb would be empty in three days.

Thus, the reading is ended with verse 11, *“but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.”* The Bible says that the *“fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”* We realize that we are ultimately not in control. We realize that we cannot control the natural world, but that God is sovereign. We realize that we are wretched sinners whose only hope is in God. We realize that God is worthy of our praise because He has preserved and delivered His creation. Our hope is in His steadfast love. He did not leave Israel in exile and ruin. He has not left His people captive to sin and death. Through the greatest act of love in Jesus Christ, He has given us hope. Our sure hope is that God is truly in control. In that, in His rule, He has shown us love and delivered us.

“Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God!”

Amen.