

Our Need for God's Mercy Psalm 51:1-17

The essence of the fifty-first Psalm is our need of God's mercy. One of the beauties of this psalm is its honesty regarding personal sin and confession. The petition is for a new beginning and new path toward wholeness and holiness. Following this is the most important request: For the joy of God's salvation and the gift of an eager spirit.

Why are we here this evening? Today is Ash Wednesday the beginning of the season of Lent. It is not surprising that this day is not popular: It is a day all about sin. This psalm asks such a foundational question: What is sin and what do we do about it? Verses one through three state, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: According to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. "

The concept of sin is a challenging one for us. Especially for those who have grown up in our Western culture. It is interesting to me that we are quick to accept the praise for our success, but quite slow (denial is not just a river in Egypt!) to accept responsibility for our sin.

God continually reminds us that we do not pull ourselves out of the pit, but it is God who continues to invite us to be the person God has created us to be.

We run hot after happiness and joy. This is what Hollywood sells--entertainment, amusement, and diversion. But it is a momentary, hollow, ecstasy. Genuine joy comes only from God. Have you discovered that most people cannot live with silence? Our society needs a boundless carnival of stand-up comics to keep us greased until we arrive home to our mind-numbing TV programming.

The concept of entertainment is not wrong some of Jesus' stories are simply hilarious. It just crazy to think that genuine joy may be discovered through the entertainment industry. Joy is not a product you purchase. Our need is not to be distracted from our hectic and frustrated lives; we don't need a prescription for a 'trank.' We need a remedy.

As we enter the spiritual wasteland of Lent, may we emerge with a new sense of joy. May God gift us with overwhelming joy as we confess our sin, reorient our lives in God, and walk with Jesus as we have never before. Alleluia. Amen