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Psalm 90,1-12

Marlene Clappier Funeral Address – 8 January 2017

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of Psalm 90, which was read earlier:

So teach us to number our days
That we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: I don't have any electronic devices to keep track of days or months or appointments or anything else. I have a desk diary that tells me that if today is January 8, then there are 357 days left in Twenty Seventeen. Do any of us think that is what Moses meant when he asked God to teach him to number our days? Eight down and 357 to go before another December 31?

Luther didn't. When Luther translated this passage he got to the sense of it and poetically paraphrased it as:

Lehre un bedenken, dass wir sterben müssen,
auf dass wir Klug werden.

Teach us to know that we have to die,
So that we might become wise.

So, it is never a question of if we have to die, but when we have to die.

Thus, I thought of this text when Marlene's neighbor phoned me on last Tuesday afternoon to tell me of Marlene's death. For Elizabeth and I that was news out of the blue – totally unexpected.

That brings me to this morning's sermon topic, "**Counting Our Days To Make Our Days Count.**" I'll develop this in three parts:

- 1) God Measures Time From Eternity To Eternity**
- 2) We Count Our Days;** and,
- 3) Make The Days Count**

1) God Measures Time From Eternity To Eternity. The title of this Psalm identifies it not as a psalm but as a prayer. It is Moses' prayer.

The sweep of the Psalm is pretty broad, and at first glance we may wonder if God is measuring time from eternity to eternity, do we frail humans have any place in God's presence or within His framework of time? The answer, of course, is "Yes."

Moses begins by stating that in "all generations" God "has been our dwelling place." This might also be translated as our "place of refuge." Either translation is correct. Indeed, for the believer, God's dwelling place is nothing less than a place of refuge. As Psalm 71 declares of the Lord:

Be Thou to me a Rock of Refuge, to which I may continually
come;
For Thou hast given me commandments to save me,
For Thou art my Rock and my Fortress. (Psalm 71,3)

When we read the Old Testament, we always must remember that when God is spoken of He is not any god, a generic spiritual being to which people of whatever faith may turn. He is the God Who told Moses that He is “the God of your father ... of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 3,6). He is the God of history. He is the God Who exists from “everlasting to everlasting,” or “from eternity to eternity.”

The LORD God is He Who created history when He created the world. He created history when He created the first humans, our first parents, Adam and Eve. He is the One Who promised to redeem history after they had fallen into sin. Indeed, this entire Psalm can be seen as a commentary on their fall and God’s promise to send the Redeemer Who would buy back this fallen creation with its false hopes and real fears.

As a matter of fact, we just celebrated the birth of that Redeemer, Jesus, God’s own Son, Who came out of eternity to take on our flesh in the manger in Bethlehem, and live and die in time to redeem Marlene and all other believers who would otherwise have died to eternity.

And thus,

2) We Count Our Days. For some reason, up until this past year, our Bible Studies in Stockton in December usually were held at Marlene’s house. At the end of the Bible Study, she would lay a pile of a couple dozen calendars which various charitable organizations had sent her and she would urge us to take what we wanted.

Now calendars are blank – that is, we don’t know what will fill up the squares of days and weeks and months as the year progresses. Even though Moses lived to be 120 years old, he knew that his age was extraordinary. For most, the life span is to be measured by 70 or 80 years.

Marlene filled up 84 calendars over the course of her life. She had indeed been blessed with that strength to live fourscore plus years, but Moses goes on to say that life as such is

labor and sorrow;
For it is soon cut off and we fly away.

What does that mean? It means our lives are colored by sin and its effects. It colors all we do and all of our days. But even more than that, it shortens our days, for its wage is death (Romans 6,23). The lives of all are lived under the shadow of sin and death, and represents God's anger at sin, the sin which dwells within each of us and the sins we actually do through actually doing evil or forgetting to do good.

Before God our iniquities condemn us. Both the sins of which we are aware and our "secret sins" (v 8). As Psalm 80 declares:

If Thou, LORD, shouldst mark iniquities,
O LORD, who could stand? (Psalm 130,3)

On this, Moses says:

Thou turnest man to destruction. (v 3)

The word "destruction" in Psalm 90 more properly means "crushed" or "pulverized," and elsewhere it refers to the "contrite," or those who mourn over their sin and turn to God for He has turned to them. It is only in turning from sin that we can:

3) Make The Days Count. Elizabeth and I saw Marlene after our service in Stockton on 18 December. She had told us she had fallen and spent a day as an out patient in hospital. She also wanted to receive communion – to confess sins, to receive absolution, and to receive the

true Body and Blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, given and shed for the forgiveness for sins.

Days which count before God are days in which we live in the forgiveness which Christ has won for us. The wise heart, then, is the forgiven heart. It is the new heart given to us in our Baptisms by the Holy Spirit. It is the new heart which is renewed as we hear God's Word. It is the new heart that clings to Jesus and His merits and sees that what we receive from God is a gift that does not depend on what we have done nor could we in any way have earned it. It is the heart which is anchored in Jesus so that every morning we may be born again through His forgiveness.

Days which count are days in which we are forgiven. In Jesus, God has turned to us so that in His Son we may find life in the place of death. In Jesus, we may find meaning in the place of meaninglessness. In Jesus, we may receive forgiveness in the place of condemnation. In Jesus we receive the hope of life in the place of the dear of death. In Jesus we have the promise of eternity regardless of the shortness or length of our days.

Marlene began her journey by being baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus in November 1932 in Onalaska. She affirmed that faith at her confirmation, and throughout her life she remained in that faith. That faith sustained her through fifty-five years of marriage and also when that marriage ended with Richard's death in 2010, and that after a year of rapidly declining health which was a result of complications from surgery.

The last time Marlene was able to come to church was at the beginning of November, when we took her picture along with the three others in our Stockton congregation who had October birthdays. Her balance became increasingly unsteady over the past year. Not in a bad

sense, but she finally got over her stubbornness and began using a cane. Even so, she only could not make it to church in August and December – and then on occasion Elizabeth and I would visit with her.

But regardless of whether she was with us or not, she always opened her heart to God in daily prayer and devotion. In an increasingly frail body, she nurtured a strong faith and she fed on God's Word, and thus kept her heart wise unto God.

Conclusion: As we thank God for Marlene's life and the gift of faith He gave her and sustained in her, we realize that our lives are limited. If we try to make our days count apart from Jesus, our counting shall always fall short on account of sin, sin which pays out its wage in death and colors all things with the futility of earthly time. We do not know how many days or years God shall grant to us. But we know that in Jesus, regardless of our life span on this earth, our lives are unlimited in Him. Thank God that from eternity He has come into our earthly time to love us in His Son. Jesus has won for us forgiveness of sin so that we may begin each day with His forgiveness and know that such days are days which count for time and eternity. Amen

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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