

**New St. James Presbyterian Church
Third Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, June 29, 2025**

**“I Will Remember Your Wonders”
Psalm 77**

The Rev. Dr. David Clark

One Presbyterian minister describes our Responsive Psalm like this: “Inconsolable despair, utter hopelessness, ultimate resignation, total abandonment: these words convey the mood of Psalm 77. Most of us have days when we feel down and depressed, anxious or afraid, but that is not the mood of [the psalmist]. The mood of [the psalmist] is despair unto death” (Enniss).

And as our psalm begins, we hear this “utter hopelessness” expressed after the psalmist had turned to God in prayer:

“I cry aloud to God,
aloud to God, that he may hear me.
In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord;
in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying;
my soul refuses to be comforted.
I think of God, and I moan;
I meditate, and my spirit faints” (vv. 1-4).

The psalmist had prayed; the psalmist had turned to God; the psalmist had reached out to God, day and night—and nothing. Nothing! For all the praying and pleading, the psalmist is collapsing—with a soul that rejects any comfort, that is impervious to consolation... Don’t think this psalm is about: ‘you’re hopeless and you turn to God and now you’re happy’; no, this psalm is about the opposite experience. The psalmist has prayed and turned to God—and nothing. The psalmist can find no sign of God—nothing. And what’s worse is that the seeming silence of God has thrown the psalmist down deeper into the depths. The psalmist was struggling already, then—turning to God and finding no help—now the psalmist is terrified of what that means.

And “the psalmist names [their] greatest fear” (Enniss), which is the fear that God has changed.

“I consider the days of old,
and remember the years of long ago.
‘Will the Lord spurn forever,
and never again be favourable?
Has his steadfast love ceased forever?
Are his promises at an end for all time?

Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Has he in anger shut up his compassion?" (vv. 5, 7-9).

While thinking about God's mighty deeds in the past, the psalmist comes to fear that God has changed. The psalmist isn't so much afraid that God can't help anymore, but rather that God won't help anymore (Rollefson); that the lovingkindness God revealed in the past has dried up; that God's compassion has ended; that God—in that startling phrase—that God has "forgotten to be gracious" (v. 9). Then the psalmist adds:
"And I say, 'It is my grief
that the right hand of the Most High has changed'" (v. 10).

That last verse is key (cf. Blake)—but part of its meaning is easy to miss, especially the language about God's "right hand." This is figurative (symbolic) language—and in the Old Testament, "[t]he 'right hand of the Lord' [describes] God's power and readiness to deliver [God's] people from distress" (Mays). This language of God's "right hand"—this describes God's willingness to save, to rescue, to redeem.

So when the psalmist names this fear that God's right hand has changed, it means that the psalmist is afraid that the God of old—the God who redeems—is not the God of today, that the God who revealed steadfast love and kindness in times past is no longer so. The psalmist is expressing this fear that—sure, there was a time when God was "gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Psalm 145:8)—but that was then, and this is now. And now—now, the psalmist has found God to be silent, absent—despairing that God is no longer the compassionate God revealed in the past.

Facing this kind of hopelessness—this fear, this despair—what can the psalmist do? The psalmist prayed, but experienced only a silence. The psalmist recalled God's past works, but ended up despairing that God had changed. So what can the psalmist do? Well, what the psalmist does next is surprising; it's a bit counterintuitive. Remembering God's works from times past had caused a terrible fear that God had changed, and yet—to resolve this fear—the psalmist commits to remembering God's works from times past. It turns out that, in this case, for the psalmist: the only way out is through.

Remembering had caused the psalmist's fear—but a deeper memory, a deeper recollection, a deeper remembering will cause the psalmist's fear to dissipate...because the more deeply the psalmist remembers God's faithfulness in the past, the more the psalmist realizes that the Lord is not a God who would change, who would cease to be gracious or decrease in compassion.

In the last part of the psalm, which scholars consider to be a kind of hymn, the psalmist offers poetic language to remember deeply the faithfulness of God. With images of water, the psalmist calls to mind God's mighty works of creation and redemption—making this world and saving it, forming life from the waters of chaos in Genesis and saving God's people Israel

through the waters of the Red Sea in Exodus. Just listen to this hymn of holy memory:

“I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD;

I will remember your wonders of old.

Your way, O God, is holy.

What god is so great as our God?

With your strong arm you redeemed your people,
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.

When the waters saw you, O God,

when the waters saw you, they were afraid [...].

Your way was through the sea,

your path, through the mighty waters [...].

You led your people like a flock

by the hand of Moses and Aaron” (vv. 11, 13, 15-16, 19-20).

The psalmist began in hopelessness, as God seemed silent...then the psalmist thought about God’s past works, and ended up even more frightened, despairing that God’s compassion had dried up. Yet then, immersed in a deeper memory of God’s faithfulness, the psalmist realizes the error of that thinking: God is not like us; we change and our compassion fails, but not God’s; our love falters and fails, but God’s love endures forever.

The psalmist moves from hopelessness to hope, from a crisis of doubt to a renewal of faith. And what makes all the difference? Memory! Remembering! By remembering deeply God’s faithfulness in ages past, the psalmist rediscovers that the God of creation and the God of Moses is the same, unfailingly compassionate God whom the psalmist turns to now.

Take a moment to let that sink in... The God who led Moses is the God who leads us; the God to whom the psalmist prayed is the God who hears us as we pray; the God who raised Jesus from the dead is the God who promises new life for us now. In a way, that should be obvious; but sometimes we fall into that same trap of thinking that the God of the past is no longer. Yet, as the psalmist rediscovered, and as we too can rediscover, the compassionate and loving God revealed in Scripture is the God who continues to uphold us today.

And, for the psalmist, this all emerged from a deeper memory of God’s past faithfulness. We can become captive to the tyranny of the present—that all-too-common tendency to shrink down our world to the last 24 hours. Yet the psalmist teaches the way of deeper memory that opens us up to that long and lasting legacy of God’s everlasting love.

So how can we share in this kind of memory? We can do precisely what the psalmist did:

“I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD,” the psalmist prayed;

“I will remember your wonders of old” (v. 11).

Remembrance of God’s faithfulness—this isn’t something that just happens. To cultivate this kind of holy memory, we need to gather as a congregation and remember together. To

cultivate holy memory, we need to gather together in worship—to hear Holy Scripture as a testimony to God’s faithfulness, to share in music that bears witness to God’s kindness, and to tell one another how God has worked good into our lives.

That is how we can cultivate the deeper memory of God’s faithfulness—so that we can remember, remember, remember what God has done, from the opening of the Red Sea to the opening of Christ’s tomb to the opening of our hearts in faith. Let this kind of holy memory take root in our midst, until we rediscover with the psalmist that God’s compassion has not changed. Amen.