



**A Sermon preached in Christ Church, Grosse Pointe, Michigan  
by The Reverend Maureen L. Martin, *Priest Associate***

**The 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 17, Year A)  
3 September 2023**

*In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

If I were leading a Bible study, I would ask you to take out your prayer book right now, and turn to the first Psalm, and find the connection between that psalm and the psalm that you just heard. This is something you could do in your quiet time during communion, whether before you've received it or after. You'll find that there is a deep connection between these two psalms. Now, we could look at the first psalm in the psalter as being like an introduction to the whole thing, and an introduction to the spiritual life in which the way of happiness is to be found in all of these things that it lists off.

In some translations, it's the way of wisdom. So let me just give you a little thought, that happiness is the result of wisdom. The happiness that comes from wisdom is not just giddy mirth, though that is fun. But happiness comes from a life lived within the Lord, and a life of faithfulness. Today's psalm though, opens with the request: "Give judgment to me Lord. For I've lived with integrity, I have trusted in the Lord and have not faltered." How often in our lives do we steer away from judgment? Though we are quick ourselves to judge others, we don't really want any on ourselves.

At some point in this last year or so, I asked Fr. Drew the rhetorical question, or maybe not so rhetorical, but I'll ask it to you, and I don't need answers:

Now that we have dismissed the wide-open gates of Hell, the potential that God's judgment could go very badly for us in the end, from our common understanding, what do we hold out to people as the reason for faith?

I ask you today, why are you here? In a day and age in which there is no social gain for getting out of bed on Sunday morning and going nowhere other than the living room with a cup of coffee, has become the norm for your friends, family.

In a day and age, in fact, where the potential is high for at least a few raised eyebrows and some silent judgment around the proverbial water cooler if you were to casually start a sentence with, "Last Sunday in church, Mtr. Maureen said;" "Last Sunday in church, Fr. Drew said;" "I was at a Bible study and



we were talking about this.” This is no longer the day and age where that’s going to go well in your life.

So why are you here? Now, I can’t answer that for you, personally. And, there’s many answers to the questions. A quick and very deeply truthful answer is that you’re here for Word and Sacrament. That you’re here to be open to God’s grace in a special kind of way that’s not necessarily available to you sitting in your living room unless you’re joining us online.

But I have an answer that I hope you may find fitting. In this psalm, there is this openness to the wisdom of God. The words are the words of someone who has spent a lifetime in prayer and simplicity and asking the question, why are we here?

Someone who can say, “Lord, I seek your judgment. I don’t shy away from it.” Not because the psalmist has steeled themselves for something horrible and is finally ready for humiliation and punishment at the hands of an angry God, but because over the years of faithfulness, they have come to find out that God is our judge, but also a friend. And not just any friend, but the one who above all others, you know you can go to with any trouble. And that friend will help you untangle the mess and set your life into order. That’s judgment. You don’t just go to your silliest friend with your biggest problems. You go to your most trusted friend for judgment.

Perhaps in your life you’ve known someone, or you are that person, who has the gift of making others cry. In a good way. Now, you know the scene. Sometimes it’s a child or an adult. They come to their parents or their friend with a heart full of woe. They are stuck. They don’t even know it, they’re so stuck. And that person with the gift of making people cry, sees that. They just see that need for a little help. And they know how in their hearts, how to communicate God’s love in such a way that soon the crying begins, and the dam is broken, and they’re on their way to solving together whatever the matter was.

If you have this gift, you just see that look in someone’s eye. And you just know the word. Or even, don’t even need the word. You know how to look at them and the waterworks begin. And you say inside yourself, oh, thank God. That’s just what they needed, was a big cry. Whether they knew it or not. This is judgment. This God’s judgment living in you, living through you. Because God’s judgment is the light that dispels the darkness. God’s judgment makes the crooked, straight. God’s judgment is God’s faithfulness to all that God has created. A commitment that’s ongoing. God’s presence, real presence, in our world always.



God did not merely set it spinning and then go off to lounge in some eternal poolside. God is here, and God is judging us with light and wisdom. An answer to why we get out of bed on Sundays, why you read your Bible, why you commit to this process of being formed and reformed daily into the likeness of God, is faithfulness. God is faithful first. Whether we show up or not, God shows up for us. And knowing that, the psalmist can speak so plainly to God. “I’ve been faithful, Lord, I’ve shown up in the courts of righteousness. I’ve not sat in the seats of the scornful, nor walked in the way of sinners.” That’s Psalm number one, by the way. That’s the key that you’re going to look for in today’s psalm when you look at it all during communion.

The psalm in which we are instructed in the way of happiness, the Psalm one, that at the heart of happiness, the true form of wisdom and of faithfulness, the true answer is showing up. Not giddiness or mirth, though those are often the byproduct of wisdom. But the simplicity of presence for the one who is present to you. The psalmist is telling God, “Hey, I did it. I’ve shown up again and again. And you know what, God? It worked. I’m not afraid of you, God, for you have become both judge and friend.” We are not to fear the judgment of God as one fears, the things that are dreadful. The poisonous spider hiding in our garbage can, the conversation with our doctor we’ve been dreading. Fear the judgment of God as we are meant to, as the word intends us to understand it. Fear with awe at the great things that God is doing in the world.

One of the names of God is “God with us”. And if I may be so bold, I would like to translate that to, God is the God who shows up. Who is always near, who lives within the human heart. And that, friends, is an answer to why you’re here. And so, feel comfortable in asking yourself that question from time to time. Why am I here? Amen.