

Sermon for March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2026

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

READINGS

Genesis 22:1-14

**1** After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” **2** He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” **3** So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. **4** On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. **5** Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” **6** And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. **7** And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” **8** Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.

**9** When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. **10** Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. **11** But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” **12** He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” **13** And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. **14** So Abraham called the name of that place, “The LORD will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”

Psalm 43

- 1** Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause  
against an ungodly people,  
from the deceitful and unjust man  
deliver me!
- 2** For you are the God in whom I take refuge;  
why have you rejected me?  
Why do I go about mourning  
because of the oppression of the enemy?
- 3** Send out your light and your truth;  
let them lead me;  
let them bring me to your holy hill  
and to your dwelling!
- 4** Then I will go to the altar of God,  
to God my exceeding joy,  
and I will praise you with the lyre,  
O God, my God.
- 5** Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you in turmoil within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my salvation and my God.

### Hebrews 9:11-15

**11** But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) **12** he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. **13** For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, **14** how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

**15** Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

### John 8:48-59

**48** The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” **49** Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. **50** Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. **51** Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” **52** The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.’ **53** Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?” **54** Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ **55** But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. **56** Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” **57** So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” **58** Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” **59** So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Our meditation for this Fifth Sunday in Lent is on our Psalm.<sup>1</sup>

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Humanity's Strength and Frailty**

Humanity is incredibly durable. Our skin is heat resistant, so a normal man can walk on hot coals for a bit and not get burned. Our bones are harder than some rocks. When adrenaline courses through our bodies, we get stronger and faster than many other creatures; in 1982, a woman lifted up a car to save her son after the rear of the vehicle fell on him – and she didn't exercise regularly.<sup>2</sup> I could go on and on, speaking of the impressive feats people have performed or discussing the ingenious way that God designed the human body, but you get the picture. Humans are *tough*.

But at the same time, humanity is incredibly fragile. There are people, and I am sure you know at least one, who have catastrophically sensitive allergies. A man might touch a single peanut, go into shock and end up in the emergency room. My father did not know that he was allergic to purple yams until he was working as a food supply delivery trucker, put down a pallet full of them at a stop, and almost died. The tiniest current of electricity can disrupt the rhythm of a heartbeat and give someone a heart attack. There are so many ways people can find themselves disabled or perishing, for crying out

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<sup>1</sup> Note to all Lay Leaders, Deacons and Chaplains. On account of a number of our Catacomb Synod congregations doing Wednesday night services (and me providing audio messages for them), the Lenten sermons will be focused on the Psalms and shorter than usual. If that does not suit your congregation, I recommend utilizing the previous year's Lenten homilies of the Lenten devotional homily from this past Wednesday.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.straightdope.com/21343756/supermom-could-a-mother-actually-lift-a-car-to-save-her-child>

loud there are articles being written on the perils of *sitting*.<sup>3</sup> For all our toughness, we are quite frail.

Man is a walking contradiction. We reach various heights, only to fall off of them shortly after we make it. We can achieve all sorts of things, but then be felled by the smallest threat. Remove a single big toe from a professional powerlifter, and you will see his career die immediately. To make matters worse, humans *victimize* each other regularly. It is not enough that our position is precarious and our lives easily taken, for we assault each other, brutalizing and murdering whenever some slight anger is inspired or some small gain is to be had. And when someone cannot *physically* harm the man they don't like, they recruit others to hurt him via slander, mockery, dehumanizing language or gossip. When any person or group of people go after you, it is no longer a matter of accidental frailty: now our mortality and the tragedy of our estate come sharply into focus.

### **The Psalmist's Plea**

The anonymous Psalmist is going through just that as he writes the forty-third Psalm. An ungodly group led by a deceitful and unjust man has assailed him; they care nothing about him except that he be harmed. So not only does he have to worry about the normal dangers of living in this world, but *now* he has to deal with these malefactors, this enemy that has him in their sites. We do not know what they were trying to do to the Psalmist, but I suspect that this was an intentional omission. They are ungodly, deceitful, unjust oppressors – a sort of people that has been around since Cain slew his brother Abel. It seems that as he pleads for God to deliver and vindicate him, he realizes that anyone could be going through a similar thing and so he leaves the details out of it.

Do you make the same plea to God, my friend? Surely you have enemies who prowl around, men and women who hate you for no good reason. Maybe they hate what you say. Maybe they hate the color of your skin or they are enraged by someone in your family. Perhaps you are dealing with people who simply like messing with strangers, and they have decided to destroy you for no good reason. Even more likely, it could be that they hate you for being a *Christian*, and being nonbelievers they follow the devil's bidding. Now, we *know* that the devil is a constant enemy to all believers, and as the piper of the heathen he does everything in his power to lead them in assailing the Church; whether you like it or not my friend, you have enemies. It is perfectly fine to sympathize with this hymn, and even to *feel* the same desperation as its author. There are indeed times when people make life so hard or dangerous for us that it appears that God has rejected us. Sometimes it goes beyond just being defensive or mad at the enemy, and we find ourselves just sitting down and mourning the tragedy of it all. But praying this Psalm is just as legitimate for you as it is for Asaph or David or the sons of Korah when it was written, for God wants us to reach out to Him when we experience these sorts of trials.

### **Deliverance**

The Psalmist prays for vindication and deliverance from these physical enemies first, and this is sensible. We ought to do the same thing when we are assailed by our enemies. He has a pressing need for it, after all. But then he prays for something else, something he understands that he – and we – will need much more than having our enemy problems alleviated. He prays for God's light, His *Word*, to lead him back. The dangers around him from his enemies have led him away from the joy of salvation, and this is more painful for him than anything an enemy could inflict. Danger is bad, especially with an entire group dedicated to harming him, but it feels *worse* to experience the spiritual dryness and isolation that come as a result of his fears. He asks our Lord to lead him to the sanctuary where he may find the Divine presence.

You see, the Psalmist is aware of humanity's frailty, but he knows that *spiritually* we are in even greater danger. The strongest men can be rendered useless with a single toe breaking. The richest men

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3 From Harvard, just one example among many: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/pain/the-dangers-of-sitting>

can be rendered poor by a slight change in the stock market. The healthiest man can be felled by the common cold. But such frailty is nothing compared to how fraught our spirits are in a world that wants to see us hurtling toward hell. A single bad mood can send us into the spiritual darkness, and a brief period of persecution can leave us feeling lost, *doubting* even, as though God was suddenly absent. It is even worse when the enemy persecuting us is ourselves, our own sin dragging us down and leading us to feel like our Lord would never forgive us or take us back.

So he prays to be brought back to God's presence by His light and truth, because these very things show us where we need to go and they refresh our souls. Go to the altar, and you shall find yourself praising Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Go to the sanctuary and be with all the saints, and you shall see that those enemies are smaller than they seemed. "Why are you cast down, O my soul," the Psalmist asks himself. "Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him." Let us see it the same way. Let us trust that if we seek the Lord and go to His Word, then He shall be faithful to restore to us the joy of salvation.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.