

Thursday Theology: A Baptismal Reflection on Psalm 90

Co-missioners,

Today's quotable quote: "The Message makes the messenger." You'll find it in this timely reflection by one of [last week's authors](#), our interim text-study editor, Mike Hoy.

Peace and Joy,
The Crossings Community

A Baptismal Reflection on Psalm 90

by Michael Hoy

My brother and his spouse ordered a special gift for my birthday in 2022. Knowing my liking of all things *Star Trek*, it was a lawn sign depicting Mr. Spock with his typical split-hand greeting and the words, "Happy 70th birthday, Michael. Live long and prosper."

You can imagine the laughter as I conveyed to them that, as much as I appreciated their gift, it came a whole year early. Nonetheless, that was last year. The seventieth year is now upon me as I write this piece, and it is much less a laughing matter as I hear the psalmist declare,

The days of our life are seventy years,
or perhaps eighty, if we are strong. (Psalm 90:10)

Nonetheless, I
take comfort over
all these years
not in what I have
accomplished in
three score and
ten, but solely in
the promise of
Christ's
forgiveness and
mercy. I take
comfort in my
baptism, by which
I am joined at the
hip with this
Jesus the Christ,
with Whom I have
died and risen in
hope and promise.
And I deeply



affirm and confess that promise of Christ most especially in the
larger context of the critical word of Psalm 90; for the verses
just prior to the aforementioned reads as follows:

You put us back to dust...

You sweep them away; they are like a dream,
like grass that is renewed in the morning;
in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;
in the evening it fades and withers.

For we are consumed by your anger;
by your wrath we are overwhelmed.

You have set our iniquities before you,
our secret sins in the light of your countenance.

For all our days pass away under your wrath;
our years come to an end like a sigh. (90:3, 5-9)

Hymnwriter Isaac Watts picked up on all of this in his hymn, "O God, our Help in Ages Past." Interestingly, that hymn was itself his own paraphrase of Psalm 90. "Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all our years away; they fly forgotten as a dream dies at the op'ning day." More often than not, we hear it sung by the faithful at many a funeral.

Luther waxes less poetically than Watts, not letting us forget the point in his rendition of Psalm 90:12: "*Lehre uns zu bedenken dass wir sterben müssen, auf dass wir klug werden.*" "Teach us to think about [the fact] that we *must* die, so that we get wise." But the deeper truth that Luther has in mind is *Who* it is that is putting us to death, and rightly so.

The Luther-like lessons of Ernst Becker in *The Denial of Death* are still classic, especially for our death-denying society that each day promotes the myth that death is nothing to be feared, though the marks of it are all around us.

For much of this past year, I have been telling people that I am pushing seventy. Now, I suppose for the next decade, *deo volente*, I will be telling them I am pushing eighty. I suppose that sounds much better than pushing up daisies, even though my spouse and I are discussing our final plans. In writing this, I have no reason to think that any such occasion for my life is immediately on the horizon, though I would be sheltering the truth that the thought has occasionally crossed my mind.

My bucket list, nonetheless, is less about cruises and going to distant lands (though I would not mind these). I have hopes of

completing the three books for which I already have more than enough groundwork in my computer. *Hope in the Midst of Crises and Chaos* is the first of these. I completed a first draft of this tome during the pandemic in 2020, but it was much too academic. I decided to rewrite it, taking into consideration the historical developments since, and make it more accessible, even pastoral. The second is *The Future of the Church*, on which I have more than a few notes, but feel it is not quite the right time to write—but given the state of the church, I hope someday soon. And last but not least (though perhaps less significant), is a memoir—for which I have only an outline with a preliminary chapter or two, though I have adopted a working title: *A Voice in the Wilderness*.

Some will see this memoir title as coming right of Second Isaiah, the prophet with whom I have had the greatest love affair over the years. But the significance is actually rooted in the New Testament. It was the title (as I recall) of the one and only sermon I ever preached in the Seminex chapel on the text from John 1:6-8, 19-28 (the gospel for the Third Sunday of Advent, Year B). The sermon itself was a final requirement for my class in Advanced Preaching with Richard “Doc” Caemmerer—and it was advanced, all the way to the final solution/prognosis of the promise! In this Johannine text and in the verses immediately following, John the Baptist “confesses” the truth, pointing to the real Source of life in Jesus the Christ.

The Message Makes The Messenger



From Canva

That, I suggested, is what we, as preachers, are sent out to do—confessing in the wilderness of this world, gifting it with all of Christ’s promise that we have from our baptisms (I was not ordained at the time) and the promising Word of the gospel. For all my fear and trembling in delivering that message not only before my peers but before my instructors, it was Bob Bertram who came up to me right after the service, giving me a big bear-hug that I will never forget, and thanking me for conveying again that gospeling-Message that he also so labored to teach us all. The Message makes the messenger. His mentoring was most profound in my life. How could I refuse him when he himself was facing the final prospects of his own death, asking me to complete his writings and see them into print? Nonetheless, I pray, *deo volente*, that the Lord blesses me with enough years to complete my own books, seeking to share the faith that has so encompassed my life.

Fact is, there is not a lot of comfort in Psalm 90, save perhaps the first and last verses:

Lord, you have been our dwelling-place
in all generations...

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
and prosper for us the work of our hands—

O prosper the work of our hands! (90:1, 17)

These bookends reminds me of the dwelling-place we all have in Christ, who makes of us in all our days a new creation, the work of his blessing in his cross and resurrection—from our first crossing in the promise of our baptism to our final crossing.

Recently I once shared with a friendly acquaintance that my brother and I had to put Dad into a home—one of the most difficult crossroad-decisions a younger generation must make about their aging parent. Given Dad's increasing dementia, however, it was the wiser choice to make at this time. When they asked how old my Dad was, I said, "95." To which she responded, "Wow! You have great genes."

Imagine my laughter in responding, "You have no idea!"

December 11, 2023

**Thursday Theology: that the benefits of Christ be put to
use**

A publication of the Crossings Community