



9th Sunday after Pentecost
July 25, 2010
Psalm 122

Ah, to Stand in the House of the LORD!

“Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, will be with us in truth and love. Amen.” (2 John 3) Dear Christian friends. You are all sinners. Jesus died for you. You are going to heaven. Amen. Please Stand...okay, please sit back down. Tell me honestly. Was that your idea of the dream sermon? ☺ Were you about to say to the Board of Elders, “Boy, you should have Pastor Scharf preach more often?” No, by God’s grace, brothers and sisters in Christ, we will echo the words of the psalmist David today and every day in Psalm 122. He speaks:

I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the LORD.”² Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem.³ Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together.⁴ That is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, to praise the name of the LORD according to the statute given to Israel.⁵ There the thrones for judgment stand, the thrones of the house of David.⁶ Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: “May those who love you be secure.⁷ May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels.”⁸ For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, “Peace be within you.”⁹ For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your prosperity.

(Looking down at my feet) I can’t believe I’m here! I get to stand before you today and proclaim God’s Word to you. I get to sit in worship and praise God for his goodness with you! The Psalmist David says, **“Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem”** like he’s looking down at his feet in amazement at where he actually is. Of all the places in the world, Jerusalem is the place where God wanted his people to come to worship him. David is having an “aha” moment as he considers what it is like to stand in the gates of God’s city – the place where God, himself, lives! If it were a movie, it might be like Rudy walking through the tunnel for the first time of Notre Dame’s stadium as a player. For a moment he pauses at the end of the tunnel, the camera pans up from a shot of his feet to see his life-long dream fulfilled. He gets to run out on that field as a Fighting Irish into a stadium full of screaming fans. It’s how I feel right now. I’m standing in the house of the Lord...with you!

But the house of the Lord hadn’t been built yet when David wrote this psalm. With these words, David was looking forward to the day when Joseph, the Jewish pilgrim, would make the long journey from his home to come to Jerusalem for a festival. David pictures Joseph’s excitement as he shouts: **“I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD!’”** Then after a long journey to Jerusalem, risking robbery and life in the process, he finally arrives at the Temple and exclaims, **“Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem.”** Jewish Joseph is so thrilled. This is where God dwells! This is where God speaks and hears and answers! There’s nowhere else he’d rather be!

Unfortunately, not all the Israelites were like Jewish Joseph. They didn’t all show the excitement over God’s city and house that the psalmist David had hoped for. The psalm says Jerusalem is where Israel went to worship and praise the Lord. Instead they worshipped their bellies and bowed down to their gold. The psalm says Jerusalem is where God’s throne of judgment stands. But they didn’t seek the judgment of God in their lives or walk in God’s paths. Instead they forged their own trails. The Psalm prays for peace and prosperity. But Israel *didn’t* safeguard the prosperity of Jerusalem. Instead they forfeited it because they didn’t realize that God was their stronghold. So Jerusalem fell. Destroyed first by the Babylonians and then centuries later by the Romans. The psalmist David, who had his own weaknesses and wanderings would have looked at the peoples’ spiritual laziness and thought, “How did we get here?”

Well, how did *you* get here? God no longer requires us to worship him just in Jerusalem, but has promised to be wherever we gather in his name. That’s right here! So, how did you get here? Parents, I’m guessing that this morning the kids woke you up bright and early by jumping up and down on your bed begging to go to church. You jumped in the shower and hurriedly dressed in unrestrained excitement about getting to church in plenty of time to get a front row seat while they were still available. Surely, on the way out the door, one of the kids shouted out, “I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the LORD!” In the car, the family was singing their favorite hymns and everyone was praying that it would be a communion Sunday so you could linger in God’s house just a little longer! When you finally arrived this morning, you paused at the door, looking down at your feet in disbelief and awe with the sigh on your heart, “Our feet are standing in your gates, O LORD!”

Right? Okay, we need to be honest. There is a part inside each one of us that didn't and still doesn't think that way. The psalm shows the awe and wonder and joy with which we should approach worship. But how do we often approach gathering together? We give the impression that the psalm of our life too often reads, "I *groaned* with those who said to me, let us go to the house of the LORD!" There are times we treat coming into God's presence as a burden instead of a joy; treating worship as drudgery instead of blessing; shuffling our feet instead of letting our hearts skip with joy. Remember what we're doing here! We're standing before God himself. Yet like Israel, we often bear the reluctant hearts of a people that kind of like our sins even while confessing that we are "by nature sinful" and vowing to live a life of love. We don't always seek the judgment of God. And though we are one living, breathing, spiritual body in Christ; a body that finds greater and greater life every time we breathe in his Word and exhale our thanksgiving, many times we don't especially seek or pray with any real sincerity for the peace and prosperity of this place. What's the result? Lost joy. So why did your feet bring you here today? That's easy. You came to see Jesus. You came to receive the joy he has and gives.

There he was. A slender pre-teen with pimples and sun darkened skin coming into Jerusalem after the long trip from Nazareth. Maybe as he walked along, he sang this psalm with his relatives. He loved this trip. Not because his family was going to "Six Flags Great Jerusalem," but because he got to go to his Father's house! He was going to the Temple! As he walked through the doors, he was home. Just picture the camera panning up from his feet as he looked at the beauty and splendor of the Temple. His heart must have skipped a beat as the prayer silently went up from his heart, "**Our feet are standing in your gates, O Lord.**" He stayed for the Festival and when everyone else was ready to leave, no one came for Jesus. When they finally realized he wasn't with them on the way home, they sped back to Jerusalem looking everywhere for him – he wasn't at the mall, he wasn't at McDavid's, he wasn't at the park. Finally, they went to the Temple and who should be there totally engaged in the conversation with the religious teachers, but the boy Jesus himself!

Mary did the motherly thing – "Jesus, we were worried sick!" His response? "Didn't you know I *had* to be in my Father's house?" In other words, "Where did you think I'd be?" And throughout his life, Jesus made joyful worship "his custom." Fast forward 21 years. The adolescent Jesus was now a beard toting rabbi. Instead of entering at the back of his family pack, he entered into Jerusalem on a donkey to the sounds of people overwhelmed with joy. It was the way it should be. But this time, he did not come for the purpose of being served. He came to serve...you.

Every time Jesus' feet had carried him up to Jerusalem, the words of this psalm were on his lips: "**Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: 'May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels. For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, 'Peace be within you.'**" But Jesus knew the history of his nation. He knew the war his people and the people of the world had provoked against God. With the way things were going, he knew there would never be peace. Not for the Jews. Not for the Gentiles. Not for you and me. So one last time, he prayed the final line of our psalm as he walked into the holy city: "**For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your prosperity.**" And that's just what he did.

For all the times his Old Testament people, and we his New Testament people, have found little joy in having our feet standing in Jerusalem, our Lord Jesus let his feet carry him to a hill just outside Jerusalem – and found his joy in the midst of the pain that allowed those feet – and hands and side – to be pierced for us.

Just picture Jesus on that cross, with his head slouched down. His feet were no longer in the safe sanctuary of his Father's house, but now walking on the coals of hell. Jesus looked down and saw the nails piecing through those feet...and that was just where he chose to be. Those he loved were secure. For the sake of his brothers and friends, he said with his blood and his death, "Peace be within you." Why? Because he wanted *you* to know the relationship he had with his Father. He wanted *you* to know the heaven he enjoyed. His life and his death answered the prayers of all the pilgrims' prayers for peace.

Do you see? Jesus is why you are here. You are here because you know that when you come here, your feet come to the foot of the cross to see your forgiveness. You are here because you want your feet to stand in awe at the empty tomb to see your own promised victory over death. Just look at where your feet are right now! Here, eternities are changed! Ah, to stand in the house of the LORD. Here, forgiveness is given! Ah, to stand in the house of the LORD. Here your God guides you and guards you throughout your life. Here God works peace between broken people – peace with God himself – peace forever in heaven. Your feet are standing in the presence of all this! That's why every week you can say with the psalmist, "**I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD.'**" Amen.

**"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. Amen."
(Colossians 3:15)**