

Psalms 90:1-12

Dear Friends in Christ (esp family and friends of Alice Kugler)

Today (this weekend) our nation is remembering the events of Sept. 11, 2001; the day, ten years ago, (today) when terrorists crashed planes into the World Trade center, the Pentagon and a field in Pennsylvania killing over 3,000 people. It's one of those events that those of us who were alive at the time will always remember, even remembering where we were and what we were doing when we heard the news. We remember thinking "how could this happen? Why would anyone do such a terrible thing?" We think of people who got up in the morning and went to work never thinking that it might be their last day on earth. We still grieve over the loss of innocent life and the loss of so many who have gone over seas to fight to try to make sure such a thing doesn't happen again. Sept. 11 reminds us of how hateful and cruel humans can be. It reminds us of the frailty of life.

(Today we also remember Alice Kugler. About three years ago she came here from California to live with her daughter, Lois Beckmann. She had already exceeded what Moses says in our Psalm, **the length of our days is seventy years—or eighty, if we have the strength.** But almost as soon as she arrived she had to have the care of the Hearthstone nursing home. Those who remember her as mom and grandmother, surely remember an active woman who served as a helper suitable for her husband as he pastored congregations in SD, NE, IA, WI and CA. But, now she had aches and pains, found it tiring and difficult to walk and even to swallow. The strength of her physical body was gone and she longed to be with the Lord. A week ago Monday, at the age of 96, God granted her prayer and took her to be with him. As family kept watch with her in her last hours there was yet another reminder of the frailty of life.)

Moses didn't experience Sept. 11. But he had been leading God's people in the desert. It's likely that he was moved by the Holy Spirit to write this Psalm near the end of those 40 years of wandering. If so, he would have witnessed the death of a whole generation of people. God had said that because they didn't trust him and enter the Promised Land when he brought them there the first time, no one age 20 or older, except for faithful Joshua and Caleb, would enter the Promised Land. They would wander in the desert until everyone 20 or older had died. Moses witnessed a lot of funerals in 40 years, thousands of funerals, including the funerals of his brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam. He recognized that no matter how long someone lives, 70, 80 even 90 years, **their span is but trouble and sorrow for they quickly pass and we fly away.** Humans are **like the new grass of the morning—though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered.** Life is short. Life is fragile. Sooner or later everyone will face death.

In view of this fact, Moses leads us to pray, **teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.**

A heart of wisdom is one that is not deceived by the attitude of the world that, despite the fact that the death rate has always been 100%, somehow thinks it only applies to other people. A heart of wisdom doesn't think that nothing bad is ever going to happen to them, that they will somehow live forever. A heart of wisdom acknowledges how fragile life is. It acknowledges that when they go to bed tonight they might not wake up in the morning, or that when they get up tomorrow, it could be their last day on earth. It acknowledges mortality.

A heart of wisdom also understands why death exists. It exists because of sin. It exists because Adam and Eve rebelled against God, listened to Satan and ate the forbidden fruit, even

though God had warned them that if they ate that fruit they would die. God made it clear to them that he wasn't joking when he said that they would die. He told them, **you will return to the ground since from it you were taken for dust you are and to dust you will return.** Moses says of God, **you turn men back to dust saying, "return to dust, O sons of men."** And the genealogies of Genesis 5 end like the tolling of a bell, **and they died, and they died, and they died.**

We are troubled by disasters like Sept. 11, or hurricanes, or tsunamis, or tornados that take the lives of so called innocent people. Such things trouble us because they remind us that we are mortal, that we could be a victim of such a disaster. But more than that, somewhere deep inside of us, these things terrify us because we are reminded of our sin and the fact that we have to stand before God in the judgment. Moses says, **we are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan.** Whether we hear of people being killed in a terrorist attack or by a natural disaster, or just standing at the casket of a loved one, we are troubled because we realize that that could be us, and one day that will be us, that we too are sinful and must **die and then face judgment.**

God gave Moses a heart of wisdom. He realized that even though he was a man of God, even though God spoke to him and through him, even though he was the most humble man on earth and was not living an openly sinful life, he was still a sinner. He confessed that nothing is hidden from God. He knows the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts. What you might think you have gotten away with, looking at pornography in the privacy of your room, glancing at the answers on your classmate's paper, wishing evil on your parents or teachers when they discipline you, hearing about a neighbor winning the lottery and thinking, that should have been me; nothing is hidden from God. The light of his presence makes our secret sins shine like a white t-shirt under a black light. And God calls them what they are- sins that provoke him to righteous wrath and call on him to send us to Hell. When we, like Moses, recognize that not a single one of our sins has escaped God's notice, we can't help but be terrified of the eternal punishment we deserve.

If all Moses knew was his sin and God's righteous wrath; if all he knew was that **the wages of sin is death and that death has passed to all men because all have sinned**, he would never have written this psalm. God had given him a heart of wisdom. He was not at the point of despair. In fact, quite the opposite. He faced the fact that life is fragile and that death may come at any moment with great confidence. He proclaims, **Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.**

A heart of wisdom acknowledges that God has always existed; he is without beginning. A heart of wisdom acknowledges that God gave birth to all that exists; he is the creator of all things. A heart of wisdom acknowledges that God is our dwelling place, our shelter. He has a place prepared for us, a place that's not made of wood or stone or gold or silver, it's not made of perishable things, but imperishable things. He is the dwelling place in which we don't have to worry about sorrow or trouble. He is the dwelling place where there is **no morning or death or crying or pain.** When our soul and body separate at physical death our soul goes to be with him. And on the last day, he assures us that, no matter how dusty we have become, he will put our dust back together and reunite our soul and body and take us, soul and body, to dwell with

him in perfect harmony for all eternity. You see he not only told Adam and Eve that because of their sin they and all their descendants would have to die. He also promised that he would send **the seed of the woman to crush the serpent's head**. He promised to send the world a savior.

Because he is from everlasting to everlasting he has kept his promise. He has sent his son, Jesus. He vented his wrath and indignation over sin on Jesus. Jesus died but he rose from the dead. He destroyed the devil's work. He conquered death. In Jesus we see God as our dwelling place, our shelter, our salvation, and he will continue to be that for however many generations are yet to come before he decides to come in judgment.

Lord, **teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom**. Lord teach us that life is fragile, so that we may be ready for death at any time. Lord teach us that the reason for death is sin and that we cannot hide even one sin from you. Let disaster, the death of a loved one, our own infirmities remind us that we have sinned and that we deserve your wrath for all eternity. Lord teach us to see that you are not only eternal and almighty, but also merciful and gracious. Lord teach us that you sent your son to live and die in our place that that you could be our dwelling place for all eternity. Lord give us a heart of wisdom through your word and sacraments. **Lord teach us to number our days aright** that we do not cling to this fleeting earthly life or the things of this earth that are temporary, but that we eagerly look forward to the day when you will take us to live with you for all eternity.

(In his grace, God gave Alice a heart of wisdom. She knew her frailty, she knew her sins, and she knew her savior. She longed to be with the Lord and to be free from pain and a failing earthly body. She rejoiced and gave thanks for opportunities to hear God's word and to receive the Lord's Supper for the assurance of her forgiveness. The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away, may the name of the Lord be praised.)