

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, May 17, 2022
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“To the Top and Back”

READING: Psalm 125 – Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people both now and forevermore. The scepter of the wicked will not remain over the land allotted to the righteous, for then the righteous might use their hands to do evil. Do good, O Lord, to those who are good, to those who are upright in heart. But those who turn to crooked ways the Lord will banish with the evildoers. Peace be upon Israel.

Last weekend I had a little vacation with my daughter Christa and her family, my son Dan and his family, Becky, and my brother Larry. We journeyed to Eastern Kentucky and visited the Red River Gorge near Campton. We had a great time. On Mother’s Day we all went see “Natural Bridge”. It’s an arch of stone about 150 feet high that’s the result of erosion and the forces of nature. It’s worth seeing but getting there was “half the fun”! You see to get there you have to take a trail that was muddy and slick from the rains of the night before. You start at the parking lot, go down about 40 stairs to the creek bottom, cross a suspended bridge that bounces with every step, and wind your way to the ascent. Then you go up hundreds of stairs, both wooden and stone. You struggle upwards over an ever-ascending trail that winds back and forth across the hillside. In places you pass steep drop-offs without guardrails. You keep straining your neck upwards hoping to see the top, but not yet. Keep walking, keep climbing, keep panting until you need a break.

The scenery is spectacular, but you can’t see it well through your tears. The smell of pines and springtime is wonderful, but you can’t savor it because you are gulping air. Other people pass you on their way back, some smiling at your misery, others trying to encourage you. You keep putting one foot in front of the other, knees and back complaining. Your goal is to reach the top, to stand on top of Natural Bridge and survey the scene, and then to enjoy the “easy” downhill stretch to your car.

Finally you see the arch of stone! It is awesome! You climb until you’re under it only to find out that now you have to traverse “Fat Man’s Misery”. It’s a cleft in the rock just wide enough to go through sideways. No one can pass anyone in it, so you have to make sure no one’s coming in the opposite direction before you climb some more. Then, finally, you’re there, standing on the Bridge looking out at the marvels of topography you can see before you. Pictures are taken. Comments exchanged. Then it’s time for the “easy” part – going back down. Only to your horror you find that going downhill is at least as uncomfortable as going uphill! “Will it ever be over?” you wonder. Then it is! Back at your car, sore and exhausted, you affirm it was all worth it (but you don’t care to ever do it again!).

It occurred to me that life is a lot like that hiking adventure. You set goals for yourself. You get an education. You find a career or a job. Perhaps you find a spouse, maybe have some children. You work your way along, achieving things, experiencing things, gaining knowledge, gaining position. You reach your peak, able and strong, survey the vistas for a time, but then comes the downhill portion of your life. To your horror it’s at least as difficult as was the climb upward. Often it’s worse. All along you have an eye on your destination: HOME! To be where the Lord is, that’s home. You’ve been journeying toward it all along. It was always the goal, always the aim. This journey we are on isn’t easy. Many people join us on it, some for significant portions of it, some just a short while. Sometimes we feel overwhelmed. Sometimes we feel lonely. Sometimes we just have to sit down and rest for a while. But always there is the journey: a gift, but also a burden.

Psalm 125 above is one of the “Psalms of Ascent”. These were Psalms the pilgrims would chant as they climbed the road from Jericho in the Valley of the Jordan to the Holy City at times of Festival. They were coming to the House of the Lord to worship and celebrate before heading back down to make their way home.

It was Easter that gave us the assurance that when finally our journey is over and we lay down to rest, our destination will be at hand. The “house not made with human hands” awaits us. Our place before the throne of God is reserved. Our new life will unfold with wonders beyond our imagining, surrounded by our loved ones and the saints of God. This earthly journey we’re on is training for and preparation for our “homecoming”. It has steep ascents, exhausting stretches, and an often-painful downhill leg, but when we reach HOME, it will have been well worth the effort. There we will rest in the arms of the Lord, safe and at peace, forever in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENT(S):

- 1) Please keep our CONFIRMANDS in your prayers. This coming Sunday they will have their CONFIRMATION DAY (May 22). Pray that God will bless, equip, and encourage them for this important event in their young lives.**
- 2) There’s a BUS EXCURSION planned for May 25. We’ll leave at 9:00 AM for St. Meinrad Archabbey for a tour, then lunch at the Overlook, and a stop to watch the turtles run at Turtle Run Winery. Your only costs are you lunch and any purchases you make. Sign up outside the office, or call Karen and ask her to do that for you.**