

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
MINOCQUA, WI  
SERMON FOR NOVEMBER 8 & 9, 2020**

- <sup>1</sup> *Lord, do not rebuke me in anger. Do not discipline me in wrath.*
- <sup>2</sup> *Indeed, your arrows have stuck in me. Your hand has come down on me.*
- <sup>3</sup> *There is no health in my flesh because of your rage. There is no wellness in my bones because of my sin,*
- <sup>4</sup> *because my guilt has gone over my head. Like a heavy burden, it is too heavy for me.*
- <sup>5</sup> *My wounds stink and ooze because of my folly.*
- <sup>6</sup> *I am drooping. I am completely bent over. All day long I go around mourning.*
- <sup>7</sup> *Even my back burns with pain. My whole body is unhealthy.*
- <sup>8</sup> *I have become numb. I am totally crushed. I groan loudly because of my anxious thoughts.*
- <sup>9</sup> *Lord, all my needs lie before you. My sighs are not hidden from you.*
- <sup>10</sup> *My heart beats quickly. My strength leaves me. Even the light of my eyes is gone from me.*
- <sup>11</sup> *My loved ones and my friends stand far away because of the blow I have suffered. My neighbors stand at a distance.*
- <sup>12</sup> *Those who pursue my life set traps. Those who seek to harm me talk about my ruin. All day long they plot deception.*
- <sup>13</sup> *I am deaf. I cannot hear. Like a mute person, I cannot open my mouth.*
- <sup>14</sup> *I am like a man who cannot hear. No response comes from his mouth.*
- <sup>15</sup> *Yet I wait for you, Lord. You will answer, O Lord my God.*
- <sup>16</sup> *So I said, "Do not let them celebrate because of me. Do not let them gloat when my foot slips."*
- <sup>17</sup> *Look! I am about to fall, and I am always in pain,*
- <sup>18</sup> *so I declare my guilt, and I am troubled by my sin.*
- <sup>19</sup> *My aggressive enemies are numerous. Those who hate me for no reason are many.*
- <sup>20</sup> *Those who repay evil for good slander me because I pursue what is good.*
- <sup>21</sup> *Do not forsake me, O Lord. My God, do not be far from me.*
- <sup>22</sup> *Hurry to help me, O Lord, my salvation.*

(Psalm 38 EHV)

It was a beautiful November morning in the Arizona desert. The air was warm – about 60 degrees, the sky a stunning cloudless blue. Along with about 20 other people, I watched three dozen pink helium-filled balloons float higher and higher into the sky until they finally disappeared from sight. Not a word was spoken by anyone. But tears were shed. They were not tears of joy, but of profound grief and sadness.

Despite the beautiful setting, it was not a happy occasion. The balloon release served as the end of a brief memorial service for a three-week-old baby girl – a little girl named Angel – an infant killed by her parents, both of whom were in jail awaiting trial for her death by physical abuse.

I attended the service not to lead it, but to support some extended family members affected by this horrific turn of events. It's a morning I still remember vividly – for the grief, the sense of loss, the incomprehensible reality of parents ending the life of a helpless child, their own child.

I'm not here to cast stones or point fingers and say that I would never do something like that. May God preserve me – and you - from such wickedness! You and I are well aware of Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 1:15 – ***"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst."*** Each of us would have to say the same: I am the worst sinner I know.

King David certainly would not claim moral superiority over those young parents or anyone else, for that matter. David was a God-fearing man. The Lord himself called David, "a man after my own heart." But David

had his troubles. All life long, he lived the life of someone who was sinful at birth, sinful even from the time of conception (Psalm 51:5). In fact, he dedicated one particular season of life to making breathtakingly godless, reckless decisions that affected the lives of people all around him and which placed his own eternal future in jeopardy.

You remember – the seduction of Bathsheba, the adultery. Then the attempt to cover up the subsequent pregnancy by trying to get her husband Uriah to spend some private time with her. The scheme backfired when Uriah turned out to be a faithful, devoted, responsible soldier dedicated to his king and his fellow soldiers. With ice running through his veins, David ordered Uriah's murder, placing him on the front lines of battle. David "graciously" married the grieving widow, their child was born but soon after, died as part of the consequence for David's terrible sins.

It was the prophet Nathan who confronted David, calling him to repentance after nearly a year of his refusing to repent. David wrote Psalm 51 after repenting and receiving the good news of God's forgiveness. It's known as a penitential Psalm, a prayer of repentance, a plea for help. The Psalm for our study today is Psalm 38, another penitential Psalm. We don't know when David wrote it, we don't know the particular circumstances, but it was definitely at a time of great stress and difficulty – difficulty brought on by his own sins: ***"I declare my guilt, and I am troubled by my sin"*** (v. 18). He also faced difficulty brought on by the actions of others: ***"My aggressive enemies are numerous. Those who hate me for no reason are many. Those who repay evil for good slander me because I pursue what is good."*** (vv. 19,20)

A key truth that David conveys here is that sin's reality replaces sin's euphoria. Sin can feel so good at the time, so right, and honestly sin often doesn't seem like that big of a deal. Sin and its consequences, though, sin and its guilt bring anguish. Here, he speaks of physical anguish: ***"Indeed, your arrows have stuck in me. Your hand has come down on me. There is no health in my flesh because of your rage. There is no wellness in my bones because of my sin, because my guilt has gone over my head. Like a heavy burden, it is too heavy for me. My wounds stink and ooze because of my folly. I am drooping. I am completely bent over. All day long I go around mourning. Even my back burns with pain. My whole body is unhealthy. I have become numb. I am totally crushed. I groan loudly because of my anxious thoughts."*** (vv. 2-8) Guilt can do that to a person. It can make you physically ill, even as it crushes the soul.

The question: What do you do in similar circumstances? What do you do with guilt? When it seems like you can't catch a break or catch your breath, what do you do? When stress and strain overwhelm you – whether it's brought on by the actions of others or by unfortunate circumstances or by your sin or most likely, by a combination of all of these – what do you do?

Sin and guilt are especially problematic. Rather than drip from the outflow of the sinful nature like a leaky faucet one drip at a time, sin rushes out with the pressure of water being released from a fire hydrant. And as David expresses, sin and guilt not only crush the soul, they hammer the body your entire well-being.

We need to do what David did. Let's take note of what he did not do. He did not blame others or ignore the problems (at least not on this occasion) or wish them away or look to someone or something else for relief. He did not look inside himself.

What did he do? First thing, he confessed his sins: ***"So I declare my guilt, and I am troubled by my sin."*** (v. 18) No excuses, no alibis, no blaming others, no flowery language – "Lord God Heavenly Father, as I respectfully seek to walk circumspect in your almighty presence all the days of my life..." No, none of that. Simply, ***"I am troubled by my sin."*** MY sin. Echoes of other penitential Psalms like 32:5 – ***"I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover up my guilt."*** And Psalm 51:3,4a,5: ***"I admit my rebellious acts. My sin is always in front of me. Against you, you only, have I sinned, and I have done this evil in your eyes...Certainly, I was guilty when I was born. I was sinful when my mother conceived me."*** I am a sinner. I have sinned.

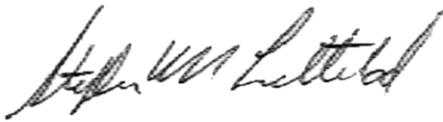
Secondly, he looked outside of himself: ***"Do not forsake me, O Lord. My God, do not be far from me. Hurry to help me, O Lord, my salvation."*** (vv. 21,22) Help me. Help. Me. I am helpless so I look to you, Lord, for

deliverance and forgiveness. David looks to the Lord, trusting that he will hear and answer and keep his promises.

Make no mistake, our remedy for “down-in-the-dumps syndrome” – whether because of others or because of circumstances or because of our own sins – we need to look outside ourselves to Christ. When anxious, stressed, and guilt-ridden, struggling with anything and everything from homework to relationships to the ever-present tug of despair and guilt brought about by our sins – be like David. Go to the Lord and take him at his Word. **“Lord, all my needs lie before you. My sighs are not hidden from you.”** (v. 9) And again, **“Do not forsake me, O Lord. My God, do not be far from me. Hurry to help me, O Lord, my salvation.”** (vv. 21,22) Help me. Help. Me.

The Lord alone is the one to turn to. The Lord alone is the one who helps. He is our salvation. He is our Savior. That says it all. He’s not our manager, coach, facilitator, quarterback, team leader. He is our Savior! Calvary’s cross and the perfect sacrifice of our perfect sinless Savior; the empty tomb which guarantees empty tombs for you and me as well, the glorious resurrection of Jesus – all bring forgiveness, life with God, peace, joy, contentment even now. All are ours through God’s gift of faith created through Word and Sacrament. Know that this Lord God, this Savior (!), will hear, and will answer, and will help – always, somehow, in his own time and in his own way. David’s confidence is ours: **“Yet I wait for you, Lord. You will answer, O Lord my God.”** (v. 15)

Some suggest that David wrote this Psalm toward the end of his life in his old age. That’s something little three-week-old Angel never got to experience – old age, a full life. You have that right now – a full life, life with Jesus. And when pressure bears down on you from outside and from inside, you can do more than release a few balloons and shed a few helpless tears. You’ve got Jesus. Trust him, lean on him. Come to him and say, “Help. Me.” He will. Today, tomorrow, forever.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Stephen W. Luchterhand". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pastor Stephen Luchterhand  
Minocqua, WI