

Student

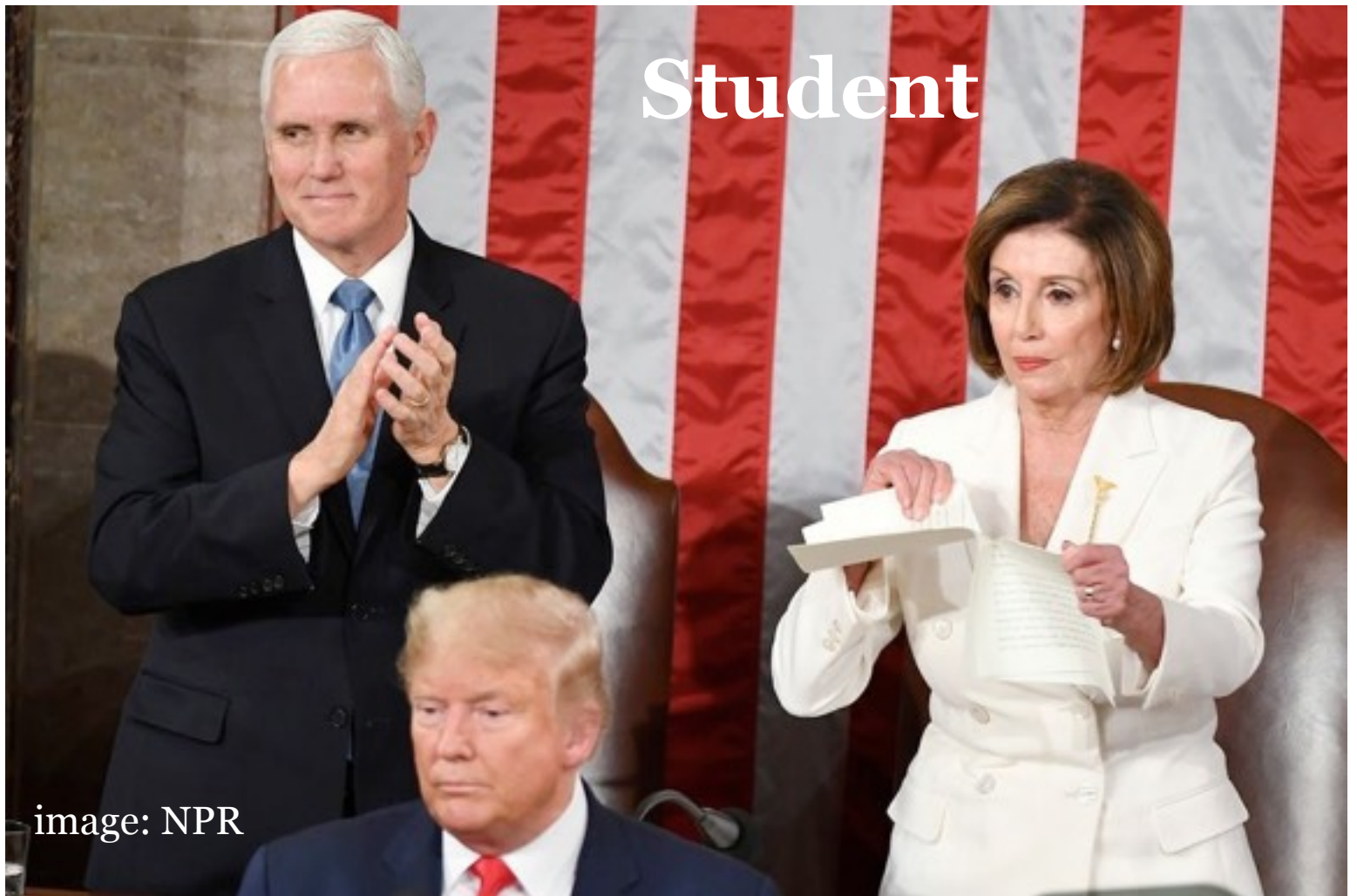


image: NPR

Psalm 112:1-10 NRSV

1 Praise the Lord!

Happy are those who fear the Lord,
who greatly delight in his commandments.

2 Their descendants will be mighty in the land;
the generation of the upright will be blessed.

3 Wealth and riches are in their houses,
and their righteousness endures forever.

4 They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright;
they are gracious, merciful, and righteous.

5 It is well with those who deal generously and lend,
who conduct their affairs with justice.

6 For the righteous will never be moved;
they will be remembered forever.

7 They are not afraid of evil tidings;

**CONCORD
SUNDAY SCHOOL**

**LECTIONARY
LESSON 6**

**SUNDAY,
FEBRUARY 9, 2020**

their hearts are firm, secure in the Lord.
8 Their hearts are steady, they will not be afraid;
in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.
9 They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor;
their righteousness endures forever;
their horn is exalted in honor.
10 The wicked see it and are angry;
they gnash their teeth and melt away;
the desire of the wicked comes to nothing.

Background

We've joked before that the Psalms are so wide and expansive that we could say "There's a Psalm for that!" about every human emotion. This particular psalm is an aspirational psalm. Let us remember that Psalm 109 speaks about the evilness of a given leader. It is the same Psalm that the Tea Party lifted when President Obama was inaugurated. It is a Psalm hoping that the "wicked man" who is leader will have "Few days" and that his children will be "orphans." Up against such a violently graphic psalm, it causes us to wonder how such an optimistic and hopeful psalm can exist just a few doors away.

Today's lesson will focus on what we do when the scripture doesn't seem to be fulfilled.

Read the scripture out loud together.

Discuss with a partner. It's been about a month and a half into the New Year. How has this new calendar year treated you? Are you feeling optimistic, disappointed, curious, overwhelmed?

What's happening during this passage?

This is a psalm of praise. And it's a psalm that reminds us how many positive consequences there are for those who are righteous. The descendants will be mighty (verse 2), they will be financially stable and fortified (verse 3), they will never be forgotten (verse 6), they are brave and courageous because they trust in the Lord (verse 7), they have upheld justice and fairness in their communities so much so that the wicked "gnash their teeth and melt away"(verse 9-10). We get the sense that those who trust

and believe in the Lord will endure beautiful payouts. The consequence of following God is wellness in the home. When people follow God, we will have a well-ordered society. Following God's commandments, according to this passage, is the foundation of a healthy society.

What are the limits of this?

We say that God is good, all the time. We say that God's ways are not our ways. We know that God is an awesome God, and greatly to be praised. Our songs, our worship, or tee-shirts and our phrases all point to the goodness of God. And God is indeed worthy of our praise and sacrifice. The last verse of this passage suggests that "the desire of the wicked comes to nothing." But is that true? If we look into the news today, it may often feel like the wicked are winning. They are stealing elections, exploiting the vulnerable, colluding with foreign powers, stealing deeds to homes from vulnerable homeowners, and so much more. This is also not new, as similar events happened during the writing of the psalms. This passage is an aspirational text, rather than a text reporting what has already happened. It may be that the desire of the wicked *ought to* come to nothing, but we know that in so many ways, the wicked win.

"They don't know God." "I'm a God-fearing man."

In our own cultural lexicon, we talk about "knowing God" as an indicator of one's morality. If we are swindled by a mechanic into paying an exorbitant fee, we might say, "he charged me like he didn't know God." Or if someone cuts us off on the highway with a "Jesus is my co-pilot" bumper sticker, we might giggle. When people reveal to us that they are Believers, we make assumptions about what they believe and how they will act. It's why we have high expectations for people coming straight out of church. We do not expect that people who just sang hymns and prayed fervently would come outside and speak without an ounce of compassion to people without stable housing. This passage is a reminder that believing in God is not just an Earth to Heaven project. It's an Earth-wide project. The writer notes all of the ways righteousness will be proven, including generational wellness, generosity, courage, and compassionate treatment of the vulnerable.

What is righteousness?

We are limited by the English language. When we say righteousness in English, we often think about moral purity, holiness, chastity. We think of "the right way" someone should act. That's part of it. The Hebrew word for righteousness is "tzedakah,"

meaning “fairness or justice.” That might reorient our ways of thinking about righteousness. As an exercise during your own devotional period, replace the word “righteousness” or “Fairness.” How does this passage sound to you now?

What questions do you still have of this scripture? How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?

Connection to Today’s World



This week, an impeached president was not removed. As an anti-climactic impeachment hearing came to a close, President Donald Trump was acquitted by a Republican majority Senate. In this historic move, he will be the first impeached president who seeks re-election. If convicted, Vice President Pence would have been his replacement (which would not have been much better). For almost

two months, U.S. representatives have been engaging in a debate about Trump’s fitness to lead the country. Republican Senators said (in private) that they were worried about retaliation, so they voted to acquit. Trump himself said, “it’s a celebration, because we have something that just worked out. I mean, it worked out. We went through hell, unfairly, did nothing wrong -- did nothing wrong. I’ve done things wrong in my life, I will admit. Not purposely, but I’ve done things wrong. But this is what the end result is. So, you can take that home. Honey, maybe we’ll frame it. It’s the only good headline I’ve ever had in The Washington Post, gotta tell you.”

Sometimes the promises of God do not feel fulfilled. Sometimes “law becomes slack and justice never prevails,” as Habakkuk tells us. When we are disappointed with the outcome, we still can be the ones who “distribute freely” and “conduct our affairs with justice.” Someone has to, especially when Leadership won’t. What might give us hope is this-- our founding documents were not written with Us (descendants of enslaved Africans) in mind. Perhaps the hope is remembering that we can imagine a new kind of America, something that includes *everyone’s* interests. A corrupt document will never convict the people it was intended to protect.

Journal: The passage speaks of “descendants” who will be mighty in the land. Write a letter to your great-great-great-great grandchildren. What do you want them to know about God? About this world? About you? Your hopes for them?

Closing: Sing *“I Will Trust In The Lord.”*

I will trust in the Lord 3x
Til I die. I will trust in the Lord 3x
Til I die.

Prayer:

Dear God,

You are good and your mercy endures forever. We can look back over our lives and our experiences and see your Hand in our lives. Remind us to be grateful and thankful for the What IS.

God, we don’t need to list to you the ways that this world is unfair and cruel. There are so many reasons to pray and to come to you. Help us to be a better representative of your Love and Care. When we do your work in the world, caution us to do so “freely” and with “generosity.” Your son Jesus sought us when we were strangers; teach us to follow his steps as we walk in the path you’ve ordered for us.

In Jesus’ name we pray,
Amen

Works Cited

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