

A MESSAGE FROM PASTOR NERSES BALABANIAN

God Is The Strength Of My Heart And My Portion Forever

Psalms 73 describes an outburst that seems to be so relevant to what happened to us Armenians. One hundred and six years have passed since the Genocide. The collective pain of those atrocities was reignited when seven months ago (September 27, 2020) Turkey and Azerbaijan invaded Artsakh and Armenia. We lost the war, we lost thousands of young soldiers, and we still have more than 200 prisoners of war in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan. The unjust situation continues when the world is silent about it. Let us turn to God's Word.

Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from common human burdens; they are not plagued by human ills. Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity; their evil imaginations have no limits. They scoff, and speak with malice; with arrogance they threaten oppression. Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. They say, "How would God know? Does the Most High know anything?" This is what the wicked are like — always free of care, they go on amassing wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence. All



On Saturday, April 24, area clergy participated in commemorating the 106th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide at the Armenian Monument at CSU, Fresno. Later that day, President Joe Biden accepted the word "genocide" as a reality in 1915. Thank you, President Biden.

day long I have been afflicted, and every morning brings new punishments (Psalm 73: 1-14).

Asaph the psalmist describes the prosperity of the arrogant and the wicked. We see words like (underlined in the passage above) pride, violence, callous hearts, evil imagination, arrogance, and oppression. Moreover, these people are mocking God saying, "**How would God**

know? Does the Most High know anything?" (vs 11). Asaph described the "wicked" people around him. It seems they are winning, becoming prosperous, and they don't care about anything. Who was this author **Asaph**? He was one of the primary musicians of the Temple. In 1st Chronicles 15, his relatives elected him to be one of the three primary singers in the Temple. In 1st Chronicles 16, David appointed Asaph to be the superintendent of music and ministries at the Temple. This man was a great musician, a man of God. It was to Asaph that David gave his songs to be adapted to the Temple. If this man expresses those feelings, how about us? It hit me when I read it again and again.

Asaph's eyes were only seeing **THEM** (*words in red in the passage above*). "They," "them" and "their" are used 13 times in 9 verses. I look at our latest war and lament. I feel the sorrow of the mothers who lost their young children in the war. I feel the pain of people who saw corrupt leadership in our nation. I do feel with these people. Looking at our situation in Armenia, and seeing "them" prosper.

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The Strength Of My Heart

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Deep down Asaph knows that “the way of the wicked leads to destruction...” (Psalm 1:6). However, he has lost his peace with God when he has lost his focus. He can only see “them” and “they”. It can happen to us as well.

The second part of the Psalm is the TURNING POINT.

If I had spoken out like that, I would have betrayed your children. When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! They are like a dream when one awakes; when you arise, Lord, you will despise them as fantasies. When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds (Psalm 73:15-28 NIV11).

The turning point starts when Asaph evaluates himself. Like what can he teach to his children? ***If I had spoken out like that, I would have betrayed your children. When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply (73:15,16 NIV11).***

What would he teach to the next generation? What kind of legacy would he leave? All the prosperity in vs. 3-14 is about the abundance of material things.

Is this what we teach our children? “Make material gain the highest good and get it any way you can have, even if you have to run over others.” Is this most the important thing in life? There is something wrong in our priorities here.

Things start looking different when Asaph meets God.

till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny (Psalm 73:17 NIV11).

He went to a **place where God could meet him**. Here is the good news: In his dilemma, in his perplexity, in his confusion, and in his pain, he did not abandon God but he went to the place where **he could meet God, and God could meet him**. This means he could **get some perspective**.

Brothers and sisters, when you are confused, disappointed, this is the time when you make an effort to see God. God can renew your sight and can give you a new perspective. When we are down, your mind does not see anything new, fresh or godly. As if God is not in control, and the “enemy” is. ***“When my heart was grieved and my spirit***



embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. (Psalm 73:21,22 NIV11) When you are down, you don’t see anything. You also become bitter...

Until you meet with God...

It is like Isaiah who saw God (Isaiah 6) and said: “Holy, Holy Holy...”. Isaiah saw who he is: ***Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips.*** (Isa 6:5 NIV11) Or like Peter who encountered with Jesus’ divine presence. After failing and not catching fish, Peter was instructed by Jesus to fish again. When Peter caught fish, abundant fish, he said to Jesus ***“Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”*** (Luke 5:8 NIV11)

God meets man, man meets God....

It happened in my life. When Jesus came into my life, my perspective about life changed. Jesus gave me a new identity, a new purpose and a meaning in life.

Do I get angry when the “wicked” “win”? Of course. But I learned that the final word is not theirs. I learned that from my Lord Jesus. He is the one who came and died on the cross. His suffering was not in vain. His sacrifice was for you and me.

He faced the “wicked” people who rejected him. Yet, his resurrection is the evidence that death, sin, and wickedness are defeated.

That is why Paul could say: ***What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? (Romans 8:31-35 NIV11)***

Lord, let us turn to you. In our distress and questions, we turn to you.

We pray that we come to you in humility to be in a daily relationship with you.

We pray for our nation to turn to you.

Teach me, O God, that you are the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Amen

MODERATOR'S REPORT

CHURCH MINISTRIES

The Church Council met in-person on Tuesday, April 27, observing the CDC regulations. Each Board and Committee presented their respective reports.

June 6, 2021 was set to hold the congregational meeting after the worship service the purpose of the meeting is to approve the proposed slate of candidates to serve on various boards/committees/organizations for the year 2021/2022 and to hear and receive the yearly reports.

In accordance with the bylaws, the Bylaws Committee presented a draft of recommended amendments to the church bylaws for approval by the Council. Following their approval by the Council, the recommended amendments will be presented to the Congregational for review and final approval at the Congregational Meeting on June 6, 2021.

Additionally, the Bylaws Committee reported and distributed the completed copy of the Policies and Procedures to act as a guide for each board, committee, and organization of the church.

I wish to thank the Bylaws Committee: Mrs. Robyn Esraelian, Mrs. Allison Karahadian, and Mrs. Cristel Tufenkian for their commitment. Thank you and may God bless you

The proposed slate of candidates to serve for the year 2021/2022 was presented by the nominating committee for approval by the council, subsequently it will be presented to the congregation on the June 6, 2021 congregational meeting for approval

A special thank you to the entire nominating committee for their work and commitment.

BIBLE STUDIES

The various Bible studies continue on a weekly/monthly basis.

WORSHIP SERVICES

We are grateful that the Fresno County COVID 19 Guidelines were relaxed, and we are able to accommodate up to 50% capacity in the sanctuary (rounded to 200 individuals).

I encourage our congregation to join us in the sanctuary on Sunday Mornings at 10:30 am, giving us the opportunity to worship

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2021 ANNUAL GIVING RECAP

Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. (Malachi 3:10 ESV)

The graph indicates budget and actual activity for the first quarter of 2021. The graph indicates the total budgeted amount for annual contributions. Also shown is the budgeted amount for the current month. The final amount shown is the actual contributions we have collected through the current month. As of March 31 we have received 86% of the budgeted amount of contributions. Praise be to God from whom ALL blessings flow. Thank you for your obedience to Him.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. (James 1:22 NIV)

As we continue the study of John I find myself still being in the Easter mindset. I've had a note of a bible verse on my desk for weeks. No doubt it's from a devotional or bible study during the Lenten season. Today I looked the verse up again and knew exactly why I wrote it down. It speaks to Jesus being the true light and that we should be walking in that light every day. If we walk in His light we will have fellowship with Him and other believers. And most importantly, we will be forgiven. The promise of Easter, our debt that Jesus paid, our debt we are incapable of paying without Jesus. His precious blood wipes away the sins we know we have committed and even those we may be unaware of. His blood washes away the stain of our sins of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

"...but if we (really) walk in the Light (that is, live each and every day in conformity with the precepts of God), as He Himself is in the Light, we have (true, unbroken) fellowship with one another (He with us, and we with Him), and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin (by erasing the stain of sin, keeping us cleansed from sin in all its forms and manifestations)." (1 John 1:7 AMP)

Who could imagine so great a mercy?

What heart could fathom such boundless grace?

The God of ages stepped down from glory

To wear my sin and bear my shame

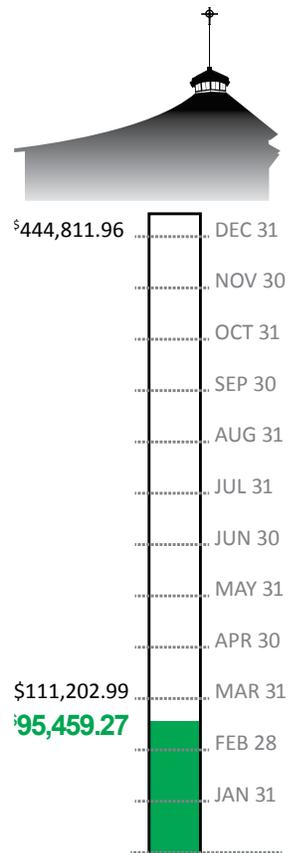
The cross has spoken, I am forgiven

The king of kings calls me His own

Beautiful savior, I'm yours forever

Jesus Christ, my living hope

Excerpt from "Living Hope" by Phil Wickham



– Treasurer Patrice Ruble

Celebrating Easter 2021: He Is Risen!



Thank you Dorcas Guild for preparing Easter bags filled with Easter treats for family and friends.



Moderator's Report

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and glorify the Lord together. Again, I thank the Congregation for following the Deacons and Trustees ushering during the worship service, in compliance with the CDC and Fresno County Guidelines.

May God continue to guide and direct our path individually and as the Body of Christ, AS WE ABIDE IN HIS WORD AND FOLLOW HIS WILL IN OUR LIVES.

– by Moderator Edward Saliba

“As it is, there are many parts, but one body.”

(1 Corinthians 12:20 NIV)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

**WITH SYMPATHY:
WE ARE DEEPLY SADDENED
BY THE PASSING OF:**

Mari Heleyan
in Sweden
(Edward Saliba's aunt)

*Well done, good and faithful servant.
You have been faithful over a little;
I will set you over much.
Enter into the joy of your master.
(Matthew 25:21)*

BIRTH CONGRATULATIONS

Paul and Clarie Koligian
on the birth of their son
Caleb Gary Koligian
on April 13, 2021

Grandparents:
Alex and Karen Jaramishian
Wayne and Sarah Koligian



ATTENTION GRADUATES!

Graduation Sunday is June 6. We would like to acknowledge the graduates during the worship service, and honor their accomplishment in a special booklet. To help us in this process, please complete the form below and submit a photo to the church office at office@pilgrimchurch.com by May 23, 2021.

Please Print

NAME _____

FATHER'S NAME _____ MOTHER _____

SCHOOL GRADUATING FROM _____ GRADE GRADUATING FROM _____

SCHOOL GOING TO _____

MAJOR WILL BE _____ MINOR WILL BE _____

Children's Ministry

Dear Church Family,

The month of April began with the celebration of the Risen Christ! We had an amazing Easter morning welcoming more than twenty-five children to the Sunday school hour. We enjoyed worship together, and the much anticipated egg hunts were had by 4th-6th grades and 3rd grade and under. Students had a memorable time reenacting John 20 – The Empty Tomb, and so much more!

We finished John 8 and have begun to study John 9. The students have done some fun things with flowers such as a flower dissection and draw and paint with me tulips. The children have planted more guta in their garden, which is doing very well! They've additionally planted corn and have relished picking and eating strawberries from their strawberry patch.

We ended the month by honoring Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day. There were discussions entailing the struggles of the Armenian people past and present. Students learned the significance of the Forget-Me-Not flower and were able to make one during the project time. We reflected on John 16:33 for comfort and eternal hope.

We invite new friends to jump in and join us anytime!

Currently, we offer classes for grades 1-6 and accept ages 4 and up.

9-9:15a – Check in

9:15-10:15a – Class

Please note: There will be no Sunday School class on May 30.

– by Children's
Ministries Director
Melinda Eritzian



PILGRIM
Armenian
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

3673 North First Street
Fresno, California 93726-6870

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP

In-person 10:30 am

Masks Mandatory • Social distancing

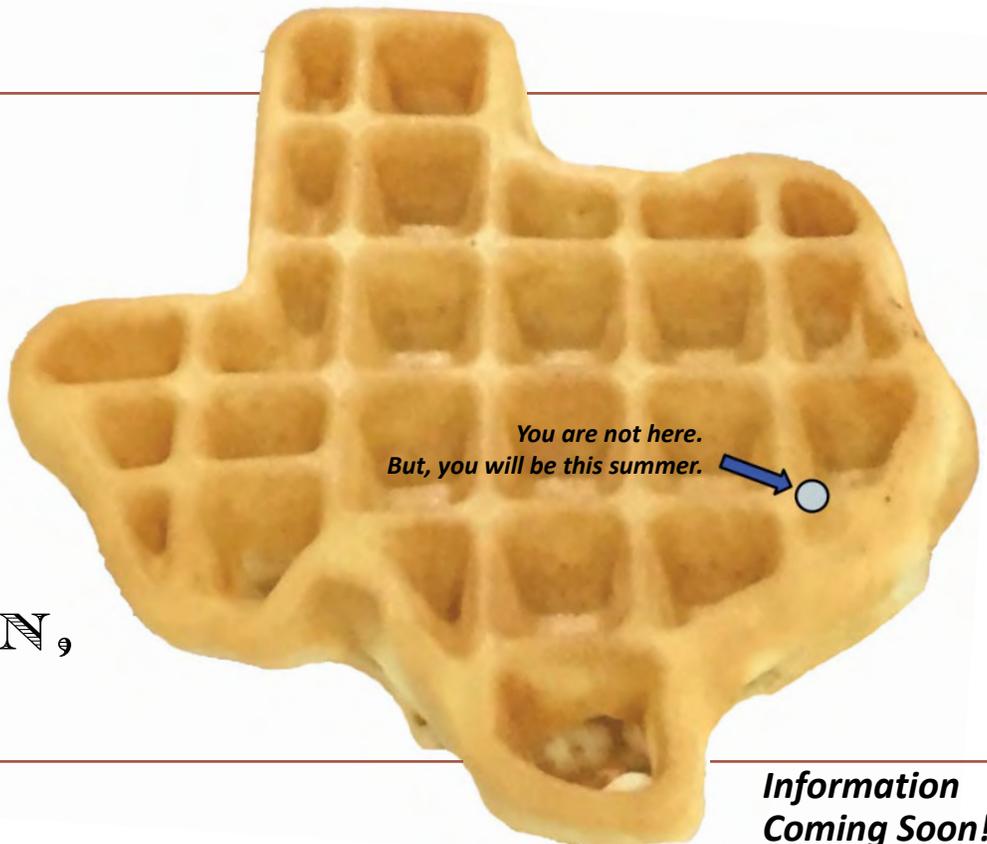
Online at 10:30 am

On our website: pilgrimchurch.com

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**Information
Coming Soon!**