

Sunday, January 4, 2026

Sermon: "Lord of Frost and Flour"

Psalm 147:12-20 NRSV

Where we are going in today's message: When a child says, "I love you," there is a definite tug on the heart strings. And when we express our love to God, it is equally appreciated.

Kids have cute ways of saying, "I love you." Maybe it's a handmade card covered with stickers, a whispered bedtime confession, or a clumsy but heartfelt hug. Parents have their own ways, too. Words are always a good thing, but when you also give children your time, care for them, or give them physical touches like hugs, pats and kisses, children are going to feel that they are safe and loved.

When a child says, "I love you, daddy," or "I love you, mommy," the heart is warmed. No doubt about it.

One way a child expresses love is to help in the kitchen. They often want to help with the baking. The fact that they are motivated solely by the opportunity to lick the remnants of the batter from a spatula, spoon or bowl is beside the point. A child in the kitchen with a parent evokes images of frosting and flour all over the floor, counter and faces. Sifting flour is one of the love languages of children, as is frosting the cake. But, like love, it is often messy!

Frost and flour. Two words that connect to today's psalm reading. They represent two striking realms of God's providence described in the passage:

Frost represents God's control over the natural world. The psalmist says, "He gives snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes" (v. 16), highlighting God's sovereignty over weather, seasons and the elements.

Flour (a poetic stand-in for the finest wheat, v. 14) symbolizes God's provision. God commands the forces of nature, no question. But God also satisfies human needs by feeding and caring for the children of God with the best of what the earth yields.

Together, frost and flour express a full-spectrum image of God's character: majestic in power yet intimately concerned with daily sustenance.

The God who commands the snow and hail is the same God who blesses children, fortifies cities and fills pantries.

Keep in mind that it is the psalmist, a child of God, who is describing the Creator Parent, and who is essentially saying, "I love you." But what makes this psalm stand out is the way it moves beyond the personal to the cosmic. The writer not only thanks God for individual blessings; he praises God for being a powerful, just, attentive and sovereign God. The writer is standing on a mountaintop, scanning the vastness of creation and history, and taking a moment to marvel - basically saying, "I love you!"

"Extol the Lord, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion!" (v. 12) the psalmist begins. It is a command, not a suggestion. And it is addressed not to an individual, but to a community. This is not a private act of devotion. This is a public celebration, a call for all of God's people to look up and pay attention. The psalmist is leading worship, pointing to the world and saying, "Look what God has done."

The opening of the psalm contains a catalog of divine deeds. You might think of them as beautiful, decorative, glitzy presents. In verse 3, the writer notes a gift that promises healing and the binding of wounds: "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (v. 3). Can you imagine the joy of a child opening the gift of healing?

Think of the Make-A-Wish Foundation, which has made the hopes, dreams and desires of thousands of children come true. Take Bo, for example, a young boy in Wisconsin who wished for a Goldendoodle puppy. The Make-A-Wish Foundation made it happen. His wish came true when Goldendoodle Charlie arrived, bringing smiles and laughter to Bo and his family - smiles they deeply needed. Bo's family shared, "He's said a million times that he can't believe it's true that we got Charlie." Charlie became Bo's constant companion, offering comfort, joy, and a sense of normalcy even on hard days. The puppy didn't erase Bo's challenges but brought daily moments of delight and companionship that lifted his spirit.

Here's a dog who made God's healing touch something real, a reminder that God sees our wounds, hears our longings, and meets us

with grace, even if it comes most improbably through the gift of a furry friend.

But the psalmist is not done. “He strengthens the bars of your gates” (v. 13), which is to say, God protects us. Not just figuratively, but literally. “God surrounds you with safety.”

The psalmist continues. “He blesses your children within you” (v. 13). This is legacy, generational grace. It is not only about the present moment but about God’s intention to bless the future through those we love.

“He grants peace within your borders” (v. 14). For Israel, borders were important, and they are still a hot-button topic today. Not only do we want secure borders, but nations are picky about who crosses these borders. Even the location of borders can be murky. When borders were constantly threatened, for the Lord to offer “peace within your borders” was the ultimate blessing. Peace is the soil where joy can grow. And not only peace: “He fills you with the finest of wheat” (v. 14). God satisfies.

“For he strengthens the bars of your gates” (v. 13). Here’s another way a child says, “I love you.” She lets the parent know that she believes there is nothing impossible for a parent. “I’ll bet you’re the best doctor [or, the strongest person, the best lawyer, etc.] in the whole town. The whole city! The whole state! The whole country! You are the best in the whole world, aren’t you?”

This is essentially what the psalmist is saying about God. “You’re the best, the greatest, most awesome God.” Like a child’s perception of a parent who can fix anything, anytime, anywhere, we, too, have confidence that God is present in our personal stories and can fix things on an “as needed” basis.

The most stunning part comes at the end: “He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances to Israel” (v. 19). The God who commands the frost, snow and flour also speaks to his people. He governs galaxies, but he also gives guidance to communities. This is not a distant, cold Creator. This is a relational, covenantal God. Israel is uniquely blessed, not because of superiority, but because God has spoken.

The psalm ends with this: "He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his ordinances. Praise the Lord!" (v. 20). In other words, there's something intimate and sacred about being entrusted with God's word.

What does this mean for us today, what steps might we take to improve our relationship with our Creator Parent?

First, we might worship from a wider perspective. Too often we only worship when something goes our way. We thank God for a good test result, a safe trip, a job offer. And we should. But Psalm 147 invites us to worship God not just for what has been done for us, but for who God is in God's divine selfness. God's power. God's mercy. God's creation. God's wisdom. Even if our personal lives are filled with chaos, God is still worthy of praise because God remains sovereign, Lord of all.

Second, we might be grateful for a revised sense of scale. This God is big, but also governs snowflakes and city gates. This God blesses children and their "snips and snails and puppy-dog tails ... sugar and spice and everything nice." This God is concerned with atmospheric currents as with your Tuesday afternoon. If we can trust God with the cosmos, we can trust God with our concerns.

Third, we might revere or honor the word of God. Verse 19 highlights the supreme gift of Scripture. God's commands and promises are not distant thunder; they are personal gifts. This social media infested world of ours is saturated with opinions, but the word of God remains a trustworthy foundation.

Finally, the psalm ends with a simple invitation: "Praise the Lord." No matter where you are, what your week has held, or how distant God may feel, this is your call to worship. Step onto the scenic turnout. Take in the view. Let your soul marvel at the sweep of God's power, presence and provision.

Because sometimes the best response to grace is to stop, wipe the flour off your face, hold up your spatula dripping with chocolate frosting and look up into the face of God and say, "I love you!"

And God will answer as any smitten parent would: "I love you more!" Alleluia, Amen.