

Upper Path Valley Presbyterian Church  
7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Quarantine

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter  
April 26, 2020  
Gary Rebok, Preaching  
"Be Still"

Who would have thought that with the turn of the new year, we would become estranged from day-to-life? We now live apart from family, Sunday morning worship and small groups, canceled vacations and concerts, watching kids/grand-kids pulled from school, and for me, a celebration of successful completion in the study of the Greek language. In recent days, I thought about those who will be missing out on graduation ceremonies, unable to walk across the stage and receive their diploma. Not to mention, watching loved ones pass on from this earth with little opportunity to gather for words of remembrance. The walls to present and future dreams have taken a back seat, watching from our televisions of empty streets, once filled with cars bumper-to-bumper. Day by day, lives began to crumble bit by bit as the numbers of those infected by the new disease began to rise. The question we find ourselves asking is, when will it all end?

Yet amid the panicked chaos of the world, a sense of peace has remained. A time of stillness with God. Our lives have gone from the daily hustle and bustle of running to do errands, the grocery store, haircuts, beauty salons, out to dinner, visiting family, or grandkids coming over to play or watch, etc. You get the picture. And then the thought of not seeing grandkids and them not seeing us played over and over in my mind. Virtual visiting is not the same. And so as I began preparing for today, I focused on two specific Psalms from this week's devotional reading. Psalm 91 & 46. Psalm 46 remains a problematic verse to follow because we don't take time to slow down. "Be still and know that I am God." But what about now that we are overcome by a disappointing and evil force to slow us down? Are we listening for God's voice? For today in Psalm 91, these are the words heard by the ancient writer. So listen to them now and hear God's voice.

Psalm 91 (New Living Translation)

"Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. This, I declare about the LORD: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him. For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease. He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings. His faithful promises are your armor and protection. Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night, nor the arrow that flies in the day. Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness, nor the disaster that strikes at midday. Though a thousand fall at your side, though ten thousand are dying around you, these evils will not touch you. Just open your eyes and see how the wicked are punished. If you make the LORD your refuge if you make the Most High your shelter, no evil will conquer you; no plague will come near your home. For he will order his angels to protect you wherever you go. They will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone. You will trample upon lions and cobras; you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet! The LORD says, "I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name. When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them. I will reward them with a long life and give them my salvation."

In the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of both Luke and Matthew's Gospel, Psalm 91 was used by Satan to tempt Jesus in the desert, and Satan said that surely Jesus could place Himself in the way of harm to demonstrate the rescuing power of God. But Satan misused God's Word, removing it from the context of the unity of Scripture. In honoring Scripture, Jesus responded, "It is written: Do not put the Lord your God to the test." What is essential to note here is that God does not condone

careless behavior, nor the misuse of Scripture, and that should put some thought into our minds concerning the pandemic we face today.

In the shade of today's diseased world, we should know that God is our refuge and comfort. It is also essential to know that if we believe in Jesus Christ, it does not give us a free pass from natural physical immunity to COVID-19. However, verses in this Psalm do indicate divine deliverance used in the prophetic books like Isaiah or Jeremiah. Consider verses 3 and 6 taken from Matthews Gospel: "For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from a deadly disease," and 'nor should you fear the disease that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday." So, the question arises how are we to interpret those statements faithfully? Again consider Luke chapter 4, where Satan takes Jesus to the highest point of the temple in Jerusalem and says, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hand so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. Jesus answered. "It says; do not put the Lord your God to the test." In other words, Satan implies, **don't go to the cross, don't suffer; if God truly loved you, you won't experience the pain of death.**

In general, what Satan points to, is to say is that "now that I'm a Christian, God won't let anything bad happen to me." It's a brilliant strategy on the part of Satan. And we see a world of people pulling back from God because of this deception that when bad things do happen, and they will, people no longer trust in Jesus. But that is not what the text is leading us to.

During the time of the Exodus, there was similar imagery to Psalm 91 of God's protective wing from verse 4. Consider these words from Exodus 19:4-6. "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now, therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

God promised that no pandemic would keep them from being the nation He foretold they would become. And the ones who would become ill and pass from this life are not excluded from the promises of God. In the Israelite context of this Psalm, the commitment of God for a new nation would come. We, too, can believe for our times, that God has promised the believer that He has prepared good works for us to do. No coronavirus can come between us and His plans. The ultimate hope and dream for this life is the ability to glorify God, fulfilling His will for us, and this cannot be disrupted or canceled.

One notable passage of hope amongst fear finds itself in the gospel of Luke 21:16-18, where Jesus tells his disciples that persecution will come. Jesus says terrible things will happen, yet I will stand behind you. Here is what Luke writes. "You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair on your head will perish. By standing firm, you will gain life." **By standing firm, you will gain life.** It means: Be Still. Be Patient. If you live for anything more than God, you are not safe. If there is something or someone in your life that is more important than God, in the end, you have nothing left, no meaning in life remaining to embrace.

If then that during difficult times, we could learn to take our hearts off the things that we make as substitutes for God, not loving those things less, like our careers or our family, but to stop and be still and hear Him speak. God is not saying in this Psalm that I will protect you from all trouble, but instead that he will protect you in and through times of crisis and stress.

As we now have moved on from Easter, we should continue to remember that Jesus Christ covers us like a mother hen, taking upon himself on the cross what we deserve for our sin. We are kept under the safety of the feathers of his wings, no matter what happens, we will find refuge. But this does not imply that carelessness ensures our protection. The Bible is not a promise box of happiness or safety if taken out of context. When you become disappointed with life, sometimes it can be hard for you to recognize Jesus. Last week Karl spoke about the disciples who encountered Jesus on the Road to Emmaus. Here is what you should remember and place in your heart. The promise of the living God rests in those who have encountered the risen Lord.

And this folks is God drawing us to Himself and rescuing us from being overcome by the world.  
As Psalm 46:10 concludes, "Be still and know that I am God." Amen