

Give Strength to Your Servant  
Rev. Nicole Farley  
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha  
July 20, 2014

**Psalm 86:11-17**

- <sup>11</sup> Teach me your way, O Lord,  
that I may walk in your truth;  
give me an undivided heart to revere your name.
- <sup>12</sup> I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,  
and I will glorify your name for ever.
- <sup>13</sup> For great is your steadfast love towards me;  
you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.
- <sup>14</sup> O God, the insolent rise up against me;  
a band of ruffians seeks my life,  
and they do not set you before them.
- <sup>15</sup> But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.
- <sup>16</sup> Turn to me and be gracious to me;  
give your strength to your servant;  
save the child of your serving-maid.
- <sup>17</sup> Show me a sign of your favor,  
so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame,  
because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

**Isaiah 44:6-8**

- <sup>6</sup> Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel  
and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:  
I am the first and I am the last;  
besides me there is no god.
- <sup>7</sup> Who is like me? Let them proclaim it,  
let them declare and set it forth before me.  
Who has announced from of old the things to come?  
Let them tell us what is yet to be.
- <sup>8</sup> Do not fear, or be afraid;  
have I not told you from of old and declared it?  
You are my witnesses!  
Is there any god besides me?  
There is no other rock; I know not one.

Two hundred ninety-five people killed when a passenger airplane was shot out of the sky. More than 330 Palestinians<sup>1</sup> killed in twelve days of fighting in Gaza. Add to those the numbers of people killed daily in person-to-person violence. At our border, children are stranded away from home with no safe place to call home. This has been a sorrowful week for our world; some would say **another** sorrowful week and rightly so. We only get a bit of Psalm 86 in our reading from this morning but it

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<sup>1</sup> Washington Post online: July 19, 2014.

begins this way: “Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you; save your servant who trusts in you. You are my God; be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I cry all day long. Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you. Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; listen to my cry of supplication. In the day of my trouble I call on you, for you will answer me. There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours. All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name. For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God.”

“You are my God; be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I cry all day long...In the day of trouble I call on you, for you will answer me.” Our psalmist despairs of the insolent who rise up against him and of the ruffians who seek his life. The prophet Isaiah speaks God’s words to the people Israel who have been exiled to Babylon, as they understand it, because they have disobeyed God and not been God’s faithful ones. These people who are strangers in a strange land despair. I’ve spoken of despair from this place before, of lament, and of crying out to God. That is where each of our readings begin and perhaps where you began when you sat down here today – whether in despair for your life or for the lives of those you love or for the lives of people you’ve never met.

I said that is where the readings begin but that is not actually what we read today, what the message is for today. The message is one of surrender. Before you let that idea rub you wrong or cause you to tune out, hear me out. I am not saying that you turn everything over to God and then it will be okay. The truth is that many times it’s not okay. Things are still hard. There is still sadness, still grief, still anger at the state of the world. Believing in God, trusting in God, does not make that go away and nothing in the Bible says it will. There was fear and sadness for the psalmist; there were many years of exile to come for the Israelites. Trusting God doesn’t “make it better” in the way we’d like to think, in the way we wish.

The psalmist says, “There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours...you alone are God.” And God through the prophet Isaiah says, “I am the first and the last; besides me there is no god...Is there any god besides me? There is no rock; I know not one.” Here is where we speak of surrender. We associate surrender with one who has less power surrendering to one who has more power – and for us, we consider that a bad thing. But that assumes that the one with more power is using it against us, not for us. Professor Steed Vernyl Davidson explains of God: “From ‘of old,’ YHWH, ‘the first,’ speaks to the witnesses. ‘Do not fear, or be afraid’ stands not simply as...words...to ensure...comfort. These words come from the context of a relationship that sees YHWH

as constantly on their side.”<sup>2</sup> When we surrender to God, we acknowledge that we have less power than God, who certainly and always has more power than us, AND this God is on our side. God is on our side. In such a position, what do we have to lose if we rely upon God? We couldn’t do worse.

God deserves more honor than that last statement suggests but sometimes our doubt and lack of understanding of God and God’s working toward salvation naturally includes a discounting of God and God’s goodness. And so, we think, we couldn’t do worse if all we have is trusting in God. The psalmist offers a prayer for us all then. “Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name.” A heart undivided is not one which is fighting for some measure of imagined control; an undivided heart completely surrenders the control to God. Why? Because God alone is God. Because there is no other god besides God; there is no rock; God knows not one. There is no one with God’s power and certainly none with power who are wholly on our side.

Surely those in fear in Gaza feel that the Israelis have more power than them. If the circumstance is as we believe we understand it today, those in the Ukraine are wielding power over the world, over people who have no part in their struggles. Power is muddy in the situation on our border but the children clearly are **not** the ones with power. Give strength to your servants, O God, that we might be your witnesses in this world, witnesses to a power which is greater than all earthly powers and which belongs to the one on the side of all God’s children.

As seven of us go out into this world to work alongside people who sense that others have more power than them, pray for us that we might share the good news of God’s power which is on their side and my side and your side. Pray for us that we might serve with God’s power alone, God who is on the side of those who are powerless. Pray that our hearts are undivided, that we walk in God’s truth. And pray for one another as we each seek undivided hearts. A good place to start is with these words: “Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth, that I may serve in your truth, that I may love in your truth, that I may work in your truth, that I may live in your truth.”

Let us pray: Teach us, O Lord, to live in your truth, to rely on your power alone, to share the good news that you are on our side even when, especially when, the future is unknown and the events of our days are out of control. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 3*, p. 247.