

With You
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First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
February 14, 2016

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

- ¹ You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
² will say to the Lord, ‘My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust.’
⁹ Because you have made the Lord your refuge,
the Most High your dwelling-place,
¹⁰ no evil shall befall you,
no scourge come near your tent.
- ¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.
¹² On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.
¹³ You will tread on the lion and the adder,
the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.
- ¹⁴ Those who love me, I will deliver;
I will protect those who know my name.
¹⁵ When they call to me, I will answer them;
I will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue them and honor them.
¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy them,
and show them my salvation.

Luke 4:1-13

- ¹ Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.’ ⁴Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “One does not live by bread alone.”’
- ⁵ Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.
⁶ And the devil said to him, ‘To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.’ ⁸Jesus answered him, ‘It is written,
“Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.”’

⁹ Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you”,
¹¹and
“On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”’
¹²Jesus answered him, ‘It is said, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”’ ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Of late, as I read through our readings for each Sunday, I have been struck by what keeps coming to me as I read – these are love stories. I keep thinking about how much what we have been reading declares God’s love for us, for humanity. Psalm 91, which you might have noticed is referenced (and misused by the tempter) in our reading from Luke, repeatedly pledges God’s devotion to us. This psalm is the foundation for hymn number forty-three in our *Glory to God* hymnal, On Eagle’s Wings. The refrain is this: “and he will raise you up on eagles’ wings / bear you on the breath of dawn / make you to shine like the sun / and hold you in the palm of his hand.” This catches me off guard – this fierce devotion, found in this love poem. I especially get caught by the lines “make you to shine like the sun / and hold you in the palm of his hand.” If we described the care of a partner or a friend or a parent like this, wouldn’t we think, “man, I’m lucky”? And we are – we are fortunate, dare I say blessed, to be loved like this by God.

If you get hung up in the magical language of this psalm, like “Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling-place, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent” and “Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name,” you are not alone. I know I put my trust in God, as best as I can in this very moment, and still there are threats, still there are evils around. It doesn’t make sense to me that God would offer empty promises; that certainly doesn’t seem the way of a God of love, especially not one who came as one of us saying, “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world [in Greek, κόσμος, *cosmos*], but in order that the world

might be saved through him.”¹ I found the words of Professor Elizabeth L. Hinson-Hasty to offer a degree of explanation: “It is not simply that God can act upon the world and protect us like a magical formula that saves us from danger. We also have to recognize our own responsibility and potential to help God realize God’s hopes and dreams for the whole creation.”²

It helped me, too, to remember that, whenever I come across a passage which does not make sense to my understanding, I must look at it in the context of the whole of the Bible. This morning the obvious place to begin was with the reading from Luke. Jesus has been baptized and then finds himself guided into the wilderness where he would be tempted. His ministry is in its infancy and he immediately finds himself in the wilderness, “where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.” We are told one of his responses to these challenges was to fast, to focus himself on resisting the temptations. And then we are told of three specific temptations, each of which he faces standing firm and grounded in Scripture. “How is **this** a love story?” you might wonder.

Let’s come back to what Hinson-Hasty had to say: “We also have to recognize our own responsibility and potential to help God realize God’s hopes and dreams for the whole creation.” Jesus didn’t resist temptation to show off. He didn’t resist temptation to throw Scripture back in the devil’s face. He resisted temptation so that he would continue to help God realize God’s hopes and dreams for the whole creation. Had he given in then and there, there in the desert, he would have given up on us. He would have given in to serve himself, which is antithetical to God’s pledges to us, God’s unconditional love of us.

He resisted temptation and cited Scripture as his guide, not for the devil but for us, so we could be reminded that having stuff and power are nothing compared to having relationship with and reliance upon God. He resisted temptation and cited Scripture as his guide to remind us not to challenge God for the sake of the challenge. “Alright, God, get me out of this.” Or, like the Pharisees, claiming “we have Abraham as our ancestor,”³ which was their way of saying, “we are God’s chosen ones – we can rest on those laurels.” Jesus resisted

¹ John 3:17.

² *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 2*, p. 36.

³ Luke 3:8.

temptation at the start of his ministry because it was the first way he could show us that we are more important to him, to God, than all that the world can offer. Like I said, a love story.

We, therefore, are called to strive to **not** make it harder on God, to **not** create circumstances from which we need deliverance or protection. And if we falter in our striving? If we push God like the devil pushed Jesus, with misinterpretation of God's loving Word and with misplaced value in worldly things? God's promises stand no matter how much we challenge God – God's promises to be with us in trouble, God's promises to rescue us and honor us. God has moved in; God is with us, interwoven with our very fibers, so that no matter what we experience, God is with us. Again, I say, a love story.

Robert Christopher Barrett has said, "We are the temples God is moving into. We are where God's Spirit comes to rest – but not only to rest! Within us, God stirs, God meddles, God provokes, God comforts, God forgives."⁴ A love story. Those who love us see our potential, tell us the truth, challenge us when we have become complacent, comfort us, forgive us. If there were never another love story in your lifetime, the most devoted love is one that you already know. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray: Loving God, we thank you. Amen.

⁴ Weavings Journal // FEB/MAR/APR 2016;
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