



Crossroads UMC Worship Series Daily Devotional

Unafraid: Living with Courage and Hope

Sunday, May 10, 2020 – “Apocalypse Now!”

God is our refuge and strength, a help always near in times of great trouble. That’s why we won’t be afraid when the world falls apart, when the mountains crumble into the center of the sea... Nations roar; kingdoms crumble. God utters his voice; the earth melts. The LORD of heavenly forces is with us! The God of Jacob is our place of safety...Be still, and know that I am God! Psalm 46 (selected verses)

MONDAY 05-11-2020 Praise to God, our dependable refuge and strength

Psalm 46:1-3, 113:1-8

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. Selah. Praise the Lord! Praise, O servants of the Lord; praise the name of the Lord. Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time on and forevermore. From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the Lord is to be praised. The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like the Lord our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth? He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people.

Sometimes we say, with a wry smile, that in today’s world “the only constant is change.” But many times this idea brings us, not a smile, but deep-seated fear. That didn’t just start. In the psalms (Israel’s hymnbook), we find mention of the world falling apart, mountains crumbling and the sea (an ancient symbol of chaos and disorder) roaring and raging. But we also find the confidence that God is high over all the changes that cause us fear. God is always our refuge and strength.

- The psalms were positive that God was present with us at any time of fear, “always near in times of great trouble.” That trust was based on the faith that God is eternal (i.e. outside of time), a God we can praise “from now until forever from now!” Have you wrestled with the mind- stretching idea that, unlike us, God is not limited by time or space, but can be with us any place and any time? In what ways is that a strong antidote to fear of change?
- What experiences have you already had that made it feel as though your world was falling apart? Did you allow your faith in God to provide you with a stable place to stand as everything else seemed to be crumbling? What makes it valuable to build your trust in God before the next time when everything seems to fall apart?



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Prayer: Lord God, I want to praise your name from sunrise to sunset because I genuinely trust that you are “high over all the nations.” Let my praise to you override my fear about any other realities. Amen.

TUESDAY 05-12-2020 God’s ultimate purpose: unshaken goodness for all people

Psalm 23:1-3, 96:10-13

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake. Say among the nations, “The Lord is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity.” Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord; for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.

The familiar *King James Version* rendering of Psalm 23:3 is “he restoreth my soul.” Along with “still waters,” it may sound to us like a day at a peaceful spa. But “he keeps me alive” (the *Common English Version’s* translation) reflects the fact that for sheep, water and grass were not luxuries, but absolute necessities for survival. The Lord who ultimately rules over our world provides the things we need to keep our spiritual life always alive.

- Israel’s neighbors worshipped a “council” of Canaanite gods who, they believed, played favorites and ruled the world unjustly (cf. Psalm 82:5). Psalm 96:10 set the one creator God against that idea. “In contrast to the unjust rule of the gods.... God’s rule of justice and righteousness promises a stable and secure foundation.” * What helps you to trust that God’s eternal justice gives your life a stable and secure foundation?
- King David, who had been a shepherd (cf. 1 Samuel 17:34-36), likely composed Psalm 23. He described God as guiding him (and all God’s children) “in proper paths.” Living as we do in a culture that places great store on our freedom to choose our own path in life, how easy or difficult do you find it to trust God to point to the proper paths for your life? How can confidence that you are on the proper path reduce your fear of change?

Prayer: King Jesus, truly, you rule! You rule the universe, including our world—yet you will rule my heart and life only if I ask you to. So please rule my life, and direct me in the proper paths. Amen.



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* J. Clinton McCann, study note on Psalm 96:10 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 947 OT.

WEDNESDAY 05-13-2020 Jesus: respect Caesar, in the context of God's kingdom

Matthew 6:9-10

“Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Mark 12:13-17

Then they sent to him some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap him in what he said. And they came and said to him, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?” But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, “Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it.” And they brought one. Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” They answered, “The emperor’s.” Jesus said to them, “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”
And they were utterly amazed at him.

Jesus’ enemies tried hard to ask him “no win” questions, for which either answer would get him in trouble. Taxes were as much or more a hot button then as they are today. But Jesus’ answer said it wasn’t as simple as a “yes” or “no” answer. There was indeed a valid realm for “Caesar” (human authority), and a citizen’s duty to pay taxes fit into that. Yet God’s kingdom was a larger realm, and in the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus clearly indicated that God’s kingdom commanded his (and our) ultimate loyalty.

- Rev. Matthew Simpson, in the funeral sermon for Abraham Lincoln in Springfield, IL, said: “To a minister who said he hoped the Lord was on our side, he replied that it gave him no concern whether the Lord was on our side or not. ‘For,’ he added, ‘I know the Lord is always on the side of right;’ and with deep feeling added, ‘But God is my witness that it is my constant anxiety and prayer that both myself and this nation should be on the Lord’s side.’” * Do you think Lincoln was correct to resist assuming that God would automatically favor whatever he decided to do? How can you allow the Holy Spirit to guide you in discerning whether you are “on the Lord’s side” of decisions in your life?



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Prayer: Lord Jesus, guide me to a clear sense of what my loyalty to you and your kingdom asks of me. Help me to respect earthly authorities, but never more highly than I respect your authority. Amen.

* From <http://lincoln.digitalscholarship.emory.edu/simpson.001/>, page 16.

THURSDAY 05-14-2020 “We must obey God rather than humans!”

Psalm 115:1-2, 9-11

Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness. Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?” O Israel, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield. You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield.

Acts 5:17-29

Then the high priest took action; he and all who were with him (that is, the sect of the Sadducees), being filled with jealousy, arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, brought them out, and said, “Go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life.” When they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and went on with their teaching. When the high priest and those with him arrived, they called together the council and the whole body of the elders of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the temple police went there, they did not find them in the prison; so they returned and reported, “We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside.” Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were perplexed about them, wondering what might be going on. Then someone arrived and announced, “Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!” Then the captain went with the temple police and brought them, but without violence, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, saying, “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring



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this man's blood on us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority.

Hebrew poets often used repetition to stress the most vital parts of their message. The triple repetition of "trust in the Lord" in Psalm 115 was an example of that. Jesus had warned his followers that, although they would face hostility from authorities, they should not fear those people (cf. Matthew 10:16-26). And when the highest religious authority in Jerusalem ordered them not to preach or teach about Jesus, the apostles trusted in the Lord and said, "We must obey God rather than humans!"

- Along with the three-fold call to "trust in the Lord," Psalm 115 repeated a promise three times: "God is their help and shield." We hear, and pray regularly, for followers of God who have lost jobs, been involved in accidents or been diagnosed with deadly diseases. In what sense is God still trustworthy at those times, still their help and shield? Have you ever seen trying times like that make trust in God even more meaningful to people?
- At the end of the gospel of Luke (of which Acts was "volume 2"), Jesus commissioned his disciples: "A change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in [Christ's] name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:47-48). When the council and the high priest ordered them NOT to preach, they saw the obedience question as crystal clear. Have you ever had to decide whether to obey God or some human authority? If so, what did you decide to do?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, to your name, always, be the glory. Empower me to live a life that, in easy decisions and hard ones, glorifies you through my loyalty and obedience. Amen.

FRIDAY 05-15-2020 God: our place of safety even in the darkest valley Psalm 23:4-6, 46:4-7

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns. The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

The expression of trust in Psalm 23 did not promise that God's people would never face



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painful, “dark valley” experiences. In fact, in common with other Biblical passages (e.g. Isaiah 43:3), it assumed that such times would come into all lives. The value the psalmists saw in trusting God lay not in being able to avoid pain and sadness, but in having God with us even in the darkest of times.

- Psalm 46:4 is poetry, not geography. “There is no river in Jerusalem. The river here is a symbol of life-giving power, in contrast to the threatening waters and waves of Psalm 46:3.” * How did that psalm set the stage for Jesus’ dramatic claim: “On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and shouted, ‘All who are thirsty should come to me! All who believe in me should drink! As the scriptures said concerning me, ‘Rivers of living water will flow out from within him’” (John 7:37-38)? In what ways has Jesus quenched your inner thirst?
- We most often think something “pursuing us” is bad. Psalm 23 reversed that, saying, “goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life.” Were there times when you, like so many of us, tried to ignore or avoid God’s presence? In what ways have God’s goodness and faithful love pursued you even if you were trying to get away from them?

Prayer: Lord God, sometimes I forget you. Sometimes I try to ignore you. But I do not want to face this scary world alone. And I thank you for never giving up on me, but pursuing me with your goodness and faithful love. Amen.

* J. Clinton McCann, study note on Psalm 46:4 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 891 OT.

SATURDAY 2.11.17 God: the unchanging “king of kings”

Psalm 46:10-11

“Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.” The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

Revelation 17:9-14 (ref Ezra 7:11-12, Revelation 11:15-19)

“This calls for a mind that has wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; also, they are seven kings, of whom five have fallen, one is living, and the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. These are united in yielding their power and



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authority to the beast; they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”

The traditional *King James Version* translation of Psalm 46:10 is, “Be still.” But the Hebrew did not refer to going to a quiet mountain retreat. It was a call to say “enough” to our noisy inner fears, and with them silenced, to recognize God as our place of safety. At the end of the Bible, in visions packed with symbols, Revelation proclaimed Jesus’ final triumph over evil. In the first century, for Christians, the persecuting Roman Empire (Rome—the city on seven mountains, or hills) was evil incarnate. The vision gave Jesus a double title— “Lord of lords and King of kings.” It echoed a title Caesar often claimed. Jesus was king, not just over “little people,” but over all other kings, even over Caesar. He was, and is, “our place of safety.”

- “The basis for the Lamb’s victory in 17:14 is that ‘he is Lord of lords and King of kings’.... Just as the Babylonian king [in Daniel 4] was addressed by this title, so the king of latter-day Babylon (Rome) in John’s day was similarly addressed.... The Lamb exposes as false the divine claims of the emperor and others like him.” * Rome was hardly unique. Human rulers have often claimed divine approval or status (e.g. Nazi soldiers wore belt buckles that said, in German, “God is with us”). Many rulers today, formal or informal, claim exalted status for themselves. Do you trust that Jesus is “king of kings” over all of them? In what ways is that trust the foundation for the peace and hope in which we can live at all times?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are the King of kings, you are the Lord of lords. I cannot fully grasp all the reach of that, but I can and do ask you to be Lord of my life, to make me the person you want me to be. Amen.

* G. K. Beale and D. K. Carson, ed. *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007, p. 1139.

Family Activity: Many people struggle with change, sometimes even fear it. As a family, name the four seasons, then invite each person to share what they like and dislike about each one. For example, the summer brings about more free time, but often high heat. The winter offers snow for sledding and snowball fights, but unsafe driving conditions. Take a moment to imagine what life would be like if you only experienced one season every day, all year long. What would you like about that? What would you miss? Remind one another that even though change can be difficult, we can often find good in the new experience or situation. Read Lamentations 3:22-23 and Hebrews 13:8 aloud, then thank God for being faithful through all of life’s changes. Pray for a heart and mind open to positive and healthy change.