

February 24, 2019

Lesson 13: Living with God's Loving Assurance

Scripture: Psalm 91: 1-8, 11-16

Context:

The last focus on love and God comes from Psalm 91. Psalm 91 is known as a classical literary piece on the sure providence of God as the citadel of faith.¹ There are two major parts, distinguished by the style of direct address to an individual “you” and by that a declaration to the divine first person.² The authorship of the psalm seems to be the work of a teacher who seeks to teach the faithful to look to the Lord as their refuge from all the troubles of life.³ The psalm would be used to give everyday Israelites comfort and ways to think of how everyday anxieties were miniscule in comparison to the steadfastness of the Lord.

However, with all the scripture texts, there is the attempt to equate faith with superstition that appears in this psalm. When reading the psalm, there might be the temptation to assert that faith in God equals the unwavering protection that is mentioned in the text. To do so misses the author's intention of giving the readers assurance that God has already claimed them and will deliver them. Faith is not a talisman against evil or death necessarily. Because you believe in God does not mean bad things will not happen or that you will never go through any woes.

When reading the psalm, the original audience would have been reminded that through all their daily trials, God was with them. God will be with them in the midst of sickness, the dark of the night, and the woes of the wicked. There will be those who help the people on their journey and they will be protected. To the end of their days, the people are reminded that God will be with them and will always be for them.

Application

This last lesson on love helps us to focus on the hope that comes with our relationship with God. Hope often looks like different things to different people as I have discovered through the years. One of my favorite lines about hope comes from Emily Dickinson: “Hope is the thing with feathers, that perches in the soul, and sings the tune without words, and never stops at all.” The melody might be different from person to person, but there is something beautiful to each person's song.

In the case of Christianity, we have hope that God will never leave us nor forsake us. Each of our stories will be different and there will be different songs that we sing, but all in all, we know trust that God will be a part of that story. As our psalmist sings and proclaims trust in God, we too are given reassurance that we can trust God to lead us through all things.

When I read this psalm, I think of all the everyday anxieties that I know that I face and how at times, there may be days that are overwhelming. There is the fear of a loved

¹ James L. Mays, “Psalms,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 2011), 296.

² *Ibid.*, 296.

³ *Ibid.*, 296.

one getting sick or even myself falling ill. There is concern about that angry church member who seems to have an axe to grind. With global warming, there's the growing fear of future storms that batter the coast. And even now, the United Methodist Church finds itself in a precarious position that seems hopeless.

Like the psalmist, these things can seem overwhelming and even debilitating at times. Yet as I read the words of the psalmist, I know that my fears are not the only ones in existence. For thousands of years, everyday people have had concerns about the future. There are always storms that may come. There are always angry, broken people who seek to hurt others. There is always the threat of illness that may come. Conflict is inevitable.

The psalmist reminds me though that these things are not to overwhelm me to the point that I cannot face the future. For God is with me in all those times and all those situations. When being with a loved one waiting for a diagnosis, God will be with us. God will give me the strength to both pray for and love that angry church member. God will be with us through the storms that batter our coasts as we discuss global warming and its effects on us. And God will definitely be with our United Methodist Church as we navigate our future together.

My hope is that you too will feel that God is part of your story and is always with you. And I pray that when the days are hard, you will find Psalm 91 and insert your own woes and pleas in the lines and conclude with the same hope that God is with you. Our God is our refuge and fortress, the one who never forsakes or leaves us.

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