**God Is My Strong Refuge**

**2 Samuel 22:26-34**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

“For who is God, but the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God? This God is my strong refuge and has made my way blameless. He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights.”

Except for last year, I hard-pressed to remember a year that has not needed these words to be more embedded in our hearts and minds. We have come out of that year when people ran scared. What happened everywhere has been bound up in fear and terror – from COVID to Critical Race Theory to Black Lives Matter to even the last election. During the election season, people had their fear, on both sides, about what would happen with our nation if “that man” became president. That fear continues today with those who are filled with fear because of who was elected.

There is something that has been bandied about as a rallying cry in the midst of all these things, “We’re all in this together.” It was and still is bandied about in regard to the ever-changing panorama that is COVID.

What other things have us living in fear? Waiting on the test results from the doctor? Taking out the child for the first drive after getting their learner’s permit? Traveling on a plane for the first time? Waiting for that test strip to see if it is blue or pink? Cut-backs at work, wondering if “my” position is on the chopping block? Afraid that Grandmas Schmedlap may not make it through the evening?

Ultimately, all these are wrapped together in the first commandment - you shall have no other gods. We know this means we are to fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

With all of these, it is clearly seen where we are failing in our trust of God. We could pass it off as human nature. It is human nature to be afraid in situations ever since the fallenness of man in the garden. Adam and Eve wanted to be like God so they ate the fruit. They wanted to be the ones in control. Ever since, we do not like things being out of our control. When we don't have a handle on things, we become afraid.

But we need to do is have a proper trust of God in the face of things it's scare us. The things of this world are passing away, and there is something that is much greater. Do we see it as such? Do we see the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the kingdom that is ours as members of his body, as the greatest thing in this life? As the thing which has the greatest eternal length?

What about all the great men in the Old Testament?

Samson, mighty Samson, was finally caught by his enemies, he had succumbed to the temptations of his wife, a spy for the Philistines. They came upon him and cut his hair. He was blinded by the Philistines and kept a prisoner because he failed to trust God and gave away his secret. But his faith and trust in God returned – with this hair. When he was brought before the Philistines to entertain them, you remember what happened. He was placed before two pillars which he pushed apart and toppled the building on top of them and himself, killing hundreds of God’s enemies.

Jeremiah was called by God to be His prophet as young man, but Jeremiah demurred saying he was young, and did not know how to speak. God sent him anyway, promising to provide him with what to say. Faithfully speaking God’s Word, he was hounded for what he was preaching against the sinfulness of the people and their foolishness in worship. They did not like to hear the Word of God taught in truth in purity.

For what he proclaimed, in obedience to God, he was whipped and put in stocks, ridiculed, attacked by a mob, and threatened by the king. When Babylon had Judah surrounded and Jeremiah continued to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins, that if they did not, God would punish them, King Zedekiah’s princes had Jeremiah arrested, beaten, accused of treason, and thrown in jail (Jer. 37:1-15), from there he was then thrown in a deep empty well. He was released from the well when the Babylonians finally captured the city. Through it all, he continued to proclaim the word of God.

A couple of weeks ago we found Elijah hiding out in the mountains. God came to him and asked him what He was doing there. God told him that the task he had been given, he was still to do. But. Elijah complained that they have killed all the prophets and he is the only one left. God told him to out and return the task.

And we know about Paul, the great apostle. He was so beloved as a preacher of the Gospel that as He wandered on his journeys he was always welcomed by the people, right? Or should we say He was often chased out of town on a rail! By the time he penned the second letter to the Corinthians, five times he had received the forty lashes less one. Three times he was beaten with rods. Once he was stoned.

Any one of these three could have given up, and who would have blamed them. “All in this together?” I think there were times they thought they were all alone. However, God did not allow them to stop in their work of proclaiming the truth of God, that would have been an unacceptable response – it would have been a violation of the 1st Commandment response.

They needed a different approach, just like we do today when a task is set before us, or when we face trials for our faith. We like to say, “I’m trying to be strong.” “I’m doing my best.” We like to think that we are the ones who are holding the family together when trials come. We are the Rock of Gibraltar when the storms assail us and everything looks on the verge of collapse.

Your strength is not enough!

Your best fails!

What are you going to do? Will you still you cling to your god – yourself?

It is said, “those who forget history are doomed to repeat it.” You know your history, it is printed in the Scripture. What makes you think are better than those who the cover Scripture’s pages? Throughout Scripture we see it happen again, and again, and again. Adam failed, Eve failed, Abraham failed, David failed, those mentioned in our sermon earlier, failed. Peter The Rock could not walk on the water and he denied Jesus three times. Failures, all of them.

So where does that leave us? You know what, that's a great question! I hope it has you wondering just exactly what you can do.

Our epistle lesson warns that anyone who thinks he stands better take heed lest he fall. It declares that the only way to endure temptation is as God provides the way of escape – that we might able to endure it. Not escape ***FROM*** it, but to endure it, withstand it.

Paul tells us in his second letter to Corinth that Satan sent a messenger, a thorn in the flesh to harass him. Three times he asked God to remove it from him. The Lord’s response was, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

What did Paul do? He came to confess something different – not his greatness, strength, boldness, or even his best. Instead, as we continue in that text we see that the Spirit let him to declare something else. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:9-10)

Paul learned that only in his own weakness could He finally be strong. As he confessed himself as weak, trusting not in himself but God, he was stronger than he could ever dream of being. He had to admit his own idolatry, confess his sin of trusting self, and trust in God.

In our Old Testament lesson God is spoken of as our rock and strong refuge. He is the one who makes our way blameless. How is it that God makes our way blameless? Simple, Jesus!

What do you believe to be true about your God? Do you believe that He will provide all that you need? Do you believe that He is a forgiving and gracious God?

That is why Jesus tells the parable in our gospel lesson. The unjust steward acted and did what he did as he lost his position as manager, knowing that his master, despite how ***he*** treated ***him***, would be gracious and merciful to him. He knew his master was forgiving. Yes, his master would remove him from his management position, but he could have rightly done so much more to him under the law.

What do you believe about your Lord and Master? Do you know His love for you? What He is willing to sacrifice to care for you? It is plainly evident! It is dripping in the blood of His own Son on the cross of Calvary. What would God do to care for you? Give His own Son to die for you – to pay the debt you owe.

You are just like I am, you continually trust yourself and try and go it on your own failing to entrust ***everything*** into the hand of God. We trust ourselves, our works, our strength, our heart, our ability – we are the god in our life.

We do not attack a task asking God to see us through it by His grace and strength as He begs us to do. Instead, we feel we are all that we need to accomplish it. The world has told you, “you are enough!” So our mantra becomes, “I am enough”

As a Christian, I know I am not enough! This life overwhelms me! I cannot take another step if I do not have help. I need the something more, the strength to carry on in this vale of tears, walking through this life, the valley of the shadow of death.

In obedience to the first commandment, we beg God's strength to be upon us. And we **expect** that **He *will***provide it. It is with that expectation in place that we rise up and step out in faith to take on each new day, every obstacle, and every new task.

You are here today because you are expecting great things from God. You are expecting that he is going to forgive you for your past idolatry – your trust in self – and this He does! We are all together in this, here. We have heard His word of forgiveness spoken into our ears.

How wonderful it is to be in this all together – here as we gather at His table with head bowed down in repentance. One body, we gather together expecting wonderful mercy from God. He is food that strengthens unto life now and salvation for all eternity. You are here for you know that it is Christ who is food that strengthens us together, as One body in Christ. You are here because you know that it is in Christ that your way is blameless, holy, and righteous. This Jesus who comes to you is your God! He is your rock! He is your refuge!

And He brings us together. No matter the time, no matter the situation, no matter the trial, no matter the temptation, we remember this Our Old Testament lesson as the proto-promise of Jesus' promise, “Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.”

When we take His yoke upon us, gathering together as His children – at His table – to receive His strength, we do find refuge in Him. In that refuge we find strength and peace! In Christ we bear one another up – all in this together.

God is our strong refuge in Christ Jesus. Let us come to Him, and in Him, find our strength. As we find ourselves in Christ, He is our strong refuge to life everlasting. Amen.