

Worship-at-home

March 6, 2022
First Sunday of Lent



“Shelter in place”

Call to worship:

(Congregational response in bold type)

We live in the shelter of the Most High

We abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

Let us worship God who is our refuge and our strength,

For God is the One in whom we trust.

The Lord will deliver us from the perils that threaten us.

Under God’s wings, we will find refuge and not be afraid.

So let us praise God, in song and in silence, with thankful hearts!

**We will worship God with heart, mind, soul, and strength,
now and always.**

Prayers of Praise, Confession, and Supplication:

Holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.

You chose to become one of us in Jesus Christ,
sharing our joy and sorrow,

manifesting your greatness in the child of the manger,
revealing your Lordship in the master washing his disciples’ feet,
showing forth your glory in the shame of the cross.

And so we praise you for your love
which is great enough to embrace the universe,
yet close enough to enter our hearts.

During our worship,

surprise us with your grace
that we, with the rest of the church
and the whole creation, may praise and adore you,
O God, our Creator and Redeemer.

**Merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed.
We have not loved you
with our whole heart and mind and strength;
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy forgive what we have been,
amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be,
so that we may delight in your will
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your holy name.
Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon:

Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation.
The old life has gone;
a new life has begun.

Believe the gospel:
In Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

Accept God's pardon,
be at peace with God,
at peace with one another,
and at peace with yourself.

Give thanks to the Lord,
for He is good,
His love endures forever.
Amen.

We offer our lives and resources:

Offering plates are positioned as you enter and leave the sanctuary. If you'd prefer to use e-transfers, please speak with Rev. Ian, Judy Armstrong (St. Andrew's), or Howard McKellar (Knox)

Hymn: #202 "We lay our broken world"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzWn1Uva-6U>

The Word of God:

God of wisdom, we long to hear your holy Word in new and fresh ways.

Open our ears to hear your call.

Open our minds to understand your truth.

Open our eyes to the work of your kingdom and equip us to take our part. Amen.

Shelter in place

In last week's sermon, I talked about the idea of *quotidian mysticism*; of being aware of the fact that we are connected with God and encircled by God in the monotony or the drama, the frustrations or the joys of everyday living in, by, and with Jesus Christ. I closed the sermon by referencing a line in 2nd Corinthians 3 in which Paul wrote that when we turn to the Lord, the veil over our hearts and minds is removed and we can recognize God's presence, protection, and provision.

The idea of turning to the Lord is central to *repentance*. Repentance is a daily holy habit of living as a child of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, connected with our Creator through Jesus Christ.

During this season of Lent, as we prepare to remember the cross of Calvary and celebrate the empty tomb of Easter through which Jesus reconciles us with the Father and makes possible this connection, I want to explore a little of what it means to *turn to the Lord*.

We begin by considering how to turn to the Lord for shelter, protection, and refuge.

READ DEUTERONOMY 26:1-11

PSALM 91.

1. One of the attributes of life in the Promised Land, is the promised presence of the Lord. Of course, God had been with the Israelites all through their wilderness travels; he'd been guiding them and providing for them, but in the Promised Land there was a sense of settled presence. There you knew where the Lord was, the Lord knew where you were. One could take their offerings to "the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name." There is a sense of holy ground, of sacred space.

Psalm 24 and Psalm 19 declare that “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” and “The heavens declare the glory of the Lord.” What this means is that every square inch of creation is God’s. He made the cosmos, and called it good. It belongs to the Creator. There is no one spot of the natural world that is less holy than another.

In a particular way, the Promised Land was sacred space for the Israelites. But what makes a space sacred is not so much the geography nor the architecture, but who it is we share the space with. The Promised Land was sacred space because of the awareness of the presence of YHWH – an awareness that was helped by ritual and offerings. Much in the same way as our worship services and rituals of sacrament and praise help us awaken to the presence of the triune God.

When we are aware of our proximity with our Creator, of our proximity with the Holy Spirit, of our proximity with Christ then where we are is sacred ground.

2. On my parent’s land there is a valley with a creek running through it and cedar trees on each side. In one place in the valley the cedars had grown quite tall and wide and the branches touched overhead. In this copse of cedars the air is cool, the light is soft, and the noise is muffled.

One day several years ago, as I walked through this stand, I was suddenly aware of those sensations: the cool air on my skin, the shade, the leaves rustling overhead, the stillness. And I stopped to pay attention – I’ve never stopped to smell the roses, but I have many times stopped to listen to the trees!

In that moment I was driven to my knees as I became vividly aware of the proximity of God. That grove of cedars, in that moment, became sacred space. A sanctuary. A sample of Promised Land.

When you awaken to the proximity of Christ, you awaken to his glory: his grace, mercy, and peace. And, in that awareness you realize you are safe. There is no judgment, nothing to fear, no pressing task lists or appointments to schedule. At one

time in history, if you were being pursued, you could take shelter in a church's sanctuary and your pursuers could not lay hands on you. In the presence of God there is shelter.

In such a sacred space you are aware that Yahweh, with His mighty hand and outstretched arm, has brought you there to offer you refuge. Shelter.

If you are reading this/watching this and are not familiar with the Lambton area of Ontario in which I live and minister, we are adjacent to what is known as "Chemical Valley." This is a stretch of several kilometers of chemical plants, refineries, and gas lines. In the event of an emergency, such as a chemical spill, gas leak, or explosion, sirens placed throughout the county will sound and citizens know that they are to *shelter in place*. This means, they are to go inside, close all windows, doors, and air exchanges, and *shelter* from the fumes/chemicals/etc. *in the place they are*.

3. The author of Psalm 91 knew nothing of gas leaks and chemical spills.

They were, however, well acquainted with other threats to one's well-being. The "deadly pestilence", the "terror of the night", and the "arrow that flies by day" could refer to physical threats such as illness, epidemics, and warfare. It could also refer metaphorically to threats such as discouragement, frustration, broken relationships, burn-out, daily stresses, injuries, trauma, ungrieved loss.

Whatever the threats, the psalmist understood the incredible blessing we have of a God who cares enough about our brokenness and our well-being to be for us our sacred space. In Jesus, God is the Promised Land; God is *shelter* in whatever *place* you find yourself.

4. The psalmist used the image of a parent bird sheltering it's chick under their wings, drawing it close to the warmth and protection of their body in order to evoke the experience of turning to find refuge in the Lord.

Maybe under wings is not the place you find shelter.

Maybe a cedar grove is not the place you find shelter.

Maybe sirens blaring through the county does not evoke for you shelter.

What does?

What is your image of finding refuge in the Lord?

I was introduced to this exercise earlier this week in a course I'm taking online. I find it to be a helpful exercise in turning to the Lord for refuge:

Ask the Holy Spirit to take over your imagination, and picture in your mind's eye a scene where there is peace, where you experience no judgment, no fear, no anxiety; where you experience quietness, calmness, safety.

What do you see?

Maybe it's a lake or shoreline. Maybe it's a boat or canoe. Maybe it's a cabin in the woods or a grove. Maybe it's a field or barn. Maybe it's a room in your house. Maybe it's a sanctuary in a church building.

Fill in the picture as much as the Spirit allows: what sensations are you aware of? What sounds? sights? smell? touches?

When the Spirit guides your imagination to create a picture of this space, ask the Lord to be there with you. Let this imagined place become a sacred space.

When the arrows fly by day and threaten your well-being, or when the terror of the night threatens your rest, you can go to your imagined place of refuge and there find the blessed shelter in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember: although the place is in your imagination, it is not imaginary.

The refuge is real.

God is real and God waits to cover you with his pinions and offer you shelter and safety under his wings.

Turning to the Lord involves turning to him for protection and provision. And there, in your imagined but not imaginary place of refuge, you can encounter the Lord and find shelter in whatever place you are.

From that place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God; that Promised Land, you can then continue living and being the channel of His grace, mercy, and peace for others overcome by the chaos of the age in which we live.

Amen.

Hymn: #528 "Jesus calls us here to meet him
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuIQUvsFDoo>

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper:

This is the joyful feast of the people of God!
They will come from east and west,
from north and south,
and sit at table in the kingdom of God.

This is the Lord's table.
Our Saviour invites all those who trust him
to share the feast which he has prepared.
O taste and see that the Lord is good.

As we come to the table,
let us examine our own faith described in the Apostles' Creed.
Please read in unison (*Book of Praise*, #539).

*The responses for the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving are in the Book of Praise
#564.*

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give God thanks and praise.

Holy God, Creator of heaven and earth,
with joy we give you thanks and praise.

You call your people to repentance,
to renew their covenant with you
and to prepare
for the joyful victory feast of the Lamb who is slain.

How wonderful are your ways, almighty God.
How marvellous is your name, O Holy One.
You alone are God.
Therefore, with apostles and prophets,
and that great cloud of witnesses
who live for you beyond all time and space,
we lift our hearts in joyful praise:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord

Hosannah in the highest.

We praise you, most holy God,
for sending your only Son Jesus to live among us,
full of grace and truth.
Sharing our joy and sorrow,
he healed the sick and was a friend of sinners.

Obeying you,
he took up his cross and died that we might live.
We praise you that he overcame death
and is risen to rule the world.
He is still the friend of sinners.
We trust him to overcome every power that can hurt or divide us,
and believe that when he comes in glory
we will celebrate victory with him.

Therefore, in remembrance of your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,
we take this bread and this cup
and give you praise and thanksgiving
as we proclaim the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died,
Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.**

Gracious God,
pour out your Holy Spirit upon us,
and upon this bread and wine,
that we, and all who share this feast,
may be one with Christ and he with us.

Here we offer ourselves to be a living sacrifice,
holy and acceptable to you.
In your mercy,
accept our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.
Fill us with the joy of eternal life,
that we may be your faithful people
until we feast with you in glory.

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honour are yours, almighty God,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Our Father ...

Hear now the institution of the Lord's Supper as recorded by the apostle Paul:
READ 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26.

Because there is one bread,
we who are many are one body,
for we all partake of the one bread.

When we break the bread,
it is a sharing in the body of Christ.

When we bless the cup,
it is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

These are the gifts of God
for the people of God.

THE COMMUNION

Eternal God,
we give you thanks for this holy mystery
in which you have given yourself to us.
Grant that we may go into the world
in the strength of your Spirit,
to give ourselves for others
in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Benediction:

Hymn #457 "Now thank we all our God"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GvSMerBDUc>

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all.
Amen.