August 16, 2015   
Psalm 61   
My God is a Rock – Lead Me to the Rock

Rev. Kerry Smith   
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Psalm 61 Common English Bible

God, listen to my cry; pay attention to my prayer! *When my heart is weak, I cry out to you from the very ends of the earth. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I am* because you have been my refuge, a tower of strength in the face of the enemy. Please let me live in your tent forever! Please let me take refuge in the shelter of your wings! Because you, God, have heard my promises; you’ve given me the same possession as those who honor your name. Add days to the king’s life! Let his years extend for many generations! Let him be enthroned forever before God! Make it so love and faithfulness watch over him! Then I will sing praises to your name forever, and I will do what I promised every single day.

My sister went to graduate school at Texas Tech. Lubbock is an interesting place. Every night we would have to clean the dust off the television. And around 5 pm the wind would shift and it smelled greatly of manure. While my sister was in Lubbock we saw the Texas Show in Palo Duro canyon one summer and then over Thanksgiving we went hiking in Palo Duro canyon and walked to the lighthouse. The lighthouse is this amazing formation in Palo Duro canyon and is on all the signs for Palo Duro canyon. We went on an easy 3 mile hike to the lighthouse and as we walked closer and closer it became more and more impressive. I was drawn to it.

In our scripture today, the Psalmist is drawn to the rock that is higher than we are. God has been and will continue to be our refuge, a tower of strength for us. I remember the Sunday after the great tragedy of 9/11, church sanctuaries were full. We were all drawn to the rock of our faith, we wanted to take refuge in the shelter of God.

I heard a story this week on the Father’s Day episode of This American Life (I am a little behind on listening to my podcasts) about a dad who wanted to create a refuge for his daughter as she moved to college in New York City in 2005. He decided the summer before she went to college that he was going to create an emergency terrorist attack kit for her to have in New York City. He packed a universal radio that did not require electricity and worked with all cell phones. He got a space blanket, flares, fuel pellets for a stove, potassium iodine pills in case of a nuclear attack. And every time her dad found a new object, he would say, “I found something new for the box.” He seemed so proud. Rachel’s dad packed all the gear into a 3X3 nondescript cardboard box, sealed it tightly with tape and then wrote winter coats on the side so as to not attract attention.

The only instruction he gave to his daughter was to not open the box unless there was an attack. So, the box sits in Rachel’s closet for one year, and for a second year unopened. Then, in her junior year she is going to London for study abroad and Rachel remembers that there is $200 in the box and Rachel really wants to go tanning before the summer starts. So, she opens the box and there is a letter from her dad inside the box. And it is a letter that says if you are reading this, something really bad has happened and I want you to know that your mom and I really love you and everything is going to be fine. And Rachel knew that she had received a great gift from her dad, the gift of safety and refuge.[[1]](#footnote-2)

“When my heart is weak, I cry out to you from the very ends of the earth. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I am.” Our spiritual path leads us toward a God that is “higher” than anything of this world. We try to go it alone and try to count on our own power but we struggle because we cannot find transformation alone. Last week we talked about the promises of God of love and grace that endure in our lives. The Psalms remind us of the steadfast nature of God, calling each of us because we are made in the image of God to be steadfast in our promises. We talked about the importance of worship because it is in this community as we worship God together that we feel safe, we feel life, we feel love, we feel grace. We know that we can face any struggle that life may bring, because we are not alone. We are surrounded and lifted up by this community of love and faith.

If God promises to me that the Lord is my solid rock, my fortress, my rescuer; God is my shield, my salvation’s strength, my place of safety, then I am going to promise to God that I will spend my Sundays in worship giving thanks and praise to God. That is my promise to God as I begin this new school year and I hope that it can be our promise to God as a church. God is my solid rock and as I worship surrounded by this community of faith I know that I can face anything, anytime.

And I know that when I am in a small group, whether it is the Hills Angels, the women’s group, or G-Men, the men’s group, or SPA (spiritual parenting for adults) or in the On the Journeys class, I know that I am in a small group that gathers to talk and share and support one another. Because it is in those small groups that we as a church can keep leading each other on the spiritual path toward the God who raises us up. When my heart is weak, and I cry out, it is my friends in this place that will help lead me to the rock that is higher than I am.

Last December I got a call from someone who I knew, but I wasn’t very close to. She asked me if I wanted to be in a covenant group where we would meet once a month for prayer and support. I said yes, but I was scared. I was scared because I was going to have to be vulnerable with these people and share my lows and my doubts and my fears. I was going to have to be open and it just seems easier to put on a mask and say that everything is fine. But I am so glad that I trusted these friends because now they are my spiritual friends and we connect weekly and share our prayers concerns. Do you have spiritual friends to help lead you to the rock that is higher than we are?

When I was in high school my mom, sister and I went to Colorado on a church trip to go hiking. I remember walking and walking and walking and what made the walk enjoyable was the view and the company. I was able to reflect and give praise to God for the beauty of God’s creation and talk with my mom and sister for support and encouragement. Walking together gives us strength to go on.

I have walked in the Komen 3-day for the last 5 years with my mom. We walk 20 miles a day each day for 3 days. And while I am training, which is supposed to be happening now, I walk by myself from 6-7 am every morning. It is a time for me of reflection and prayer and me as I talk with God. Then, during the actual Komen 3-day I am able to walk with my mom as we talk and cheer each other on. I love both, spending time alone training where it is me and Jesus and I love the actual race when I am surrounded by others and we are encouraging one another. When our hearts are weak, may we cry out to God from the very ends of the earth and may we walk together giving thanks to God as we are lead to the rock. Amen.

Prayer Loving God, your goodness is all around us. But sometimes it seems overshadowed by pain, death, and suffering. Assure us in times of doubt that you are the God of resurrection. May our lips sing your praise, and may our lives be a living sacrifice to you. Amen.

Benediction May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you: wherever God may send you; may God guide you through the wilderness: protect you through the storm; may God bring you home rejoicing: at the wonders God has shown you; may God bring you home rejoicing: once again into our doors.

1. http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/438/fathers-day-2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)