

March 13, 2022
Rev. Kerry Smith

Psalms: Honest to God
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Psalm 15

New Revised Standard Version

O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart; who do not slander with their tongue, and do no evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach against their neighbors; in whose eyes the wicked are despised, but who honor those who fear the Lord; who stand by their oath even to their hurt; who do not lend money at interest, and do not take a bribe against the innocent. Those who do these things shall never be moved.

One morning this week I woke up in a panic. I heard a cat meowing and I ran all around the house trying to find the trapped cat, in my dream. I could have described how it felt to hold that sweet cat, my dream had felt so real. The only problem is, I don't have a cat. I was sharing about my dream with a friend and they said, "Do you feel trapped? What are you worried about?" Their question made me laugh because I am a worrier. I am always worrying about something! Matthew 6:34 is something I remind myself every day, "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today." I know that in my head but when I'm worrying, just like the cat in my dream, it feels so real.

We chanted together an entrance hymn. Imagine that you are a pilgrim coming to Jerusalem to worship at the temple. You can't just walk right into the temple area because there is a procedure that is to be followed. At the gate of the temple is a priest or a temple official. As a pilgrim to the temple, you ask some set questions. "O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?" Then the temple official or the priest gives a response, "those walking blamelessly, and doing what is right, and speaking truth from their hearts." It reminds me of one of my favorite Bible verses Micah 6:8 which is also an entrance hymn. "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

As someone is about to enter the temple to worship God, they are invited to reflect on how they are living their life. Are they doing what is right? If I were at those temple gates right now, I would have to say I need to lay down my worry because I want to worship God with a heart and life of integrity. Am I worthy to come in and worship God? The psalm is going to give me specific examples. How are my relationships with friends and neighbors? Have I been talking about them behind their back? Have I been gossiping or slandering? If I come to worship God in the temple, I should not be exploiting my neighbors with exorbitant interest rates or with underhanded bribes. Once the priest or the temple official and I have finished this back and forth, the priest would welcome me to worship, "Shalom," they would say, "Come in to worship."

It is fascinating that there is all of this back and forth to enter into the sanctuary, but the questions are all about what happens when we are in the world outside of the sanctuary. Admission to worship depends on how we conduct ourselves in our community. Lives that are blameless, lips that speak the truth, feet that do not rush off to spread gossip. Not oppressing the poor with unfair interest rates. Not breaking promises and not getting involved in bribery. Do we do things that damage the community or do we try to build up our neighbors? It is the sort of everyday life expected of God's people when they are outside the sanctuary, out and about in their homes, running errands, at the Starbucks, at their jobs, in traffic on 75, and talking to their friends. Every week we come to worship and we leave to be God's people in the world seeking to live lives worthy of our callings.

There is a daily Lenten devotional guide that I have been reading. The link is in your newsletter. I am still thinking about a quote that was in the daily devotional 8 days ago. It was a

quote from writer Paula D'Arcy. She said, "God comes to us disguised as our life." God is with us in our lives in our present moment. God is in the midst of our mess and our stress. We don't need to wait for a future perfect time to reconnect with God. God is already here no matter what is happening in or around us.

During the early days of the pandemic as a family we watched a movie every night and we decided to watch the Marvel superhero movies in release date order (not chronological) starting with *Iron Man* and ending with *The Avengers: Endgame*. There are twenty-seven movies in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, MCU, for short. My favorites were when we learned the superhero's origin stories. There usually would be tragedy and each hero would gain a unique vocation to channel their power in service to others. It usually wasn't a perfect path, but each hero would draw upon the roots of their past to meet the needs of people near by and people far away. Can we draw upon the roots of our past to meet the needs of others? Yes, we can.

Katherine Noll shared with me a poem this week by John Roedel.¹

I can't make the
world be peaceful
I can't stall tanks
from roaring down streets
I can't prevent children
from having to hide in bunkers
I can't convince the news to
stop turning war into a video game
I can't silence the sound of bombs
tearing neighborhoods apart
I can't transform a guided missile
into a bouquet of flowers
I can't make a warmonger
have an ounce of empathy
I can't convince ambassadors
to quit playing truth or dare
I can't deflect a sniper's bullet
from turning a wife into a widow
I can't stave off a country from being
reduced to ash and to rubble
I can't do any of that
the only thing I can do
is to love the next person I encounter
without any strings or conditions
to love my neighbor
so fearlessly that
it causes a ripple
that stretches from
one horizon to the next
I can't force peace
upon the world
but I can become a force

¹ <https://www.johnroedel.com>

of peace in the world
because sometimes
sometimes all it takes
is a candle, a single candle
lit in the darkness
to start a movement

God asks us to be a candle of comfort in this world so that we may burn with peace. I love that old quote “The church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints,” however, we don’t get to use that as an excuse. We worship in this temple to honor God and we honor God by shaping our lives around God’s will. Which makes me think of another great quote by Maya Angelou, “When you know better, you do better.”

When I read through Psalm 15, I wonder if this applies to me. I’m not loaning money and charging interest. I’m not accepting bribes against the innocent. But I do love some good gossip. I don’t know all of my neighbors. I do not walk blamelessly. I try to do what’s right, but I fail each and every day. Are you and I worshipping God with a heart and life of integrity? If we aren’t, we can be forgiven and be renewed to start afresh right now. Thanks be to God, Amen.