August 23, 2015

Psalm 27

My God is a Rock – Shelter of the Rock

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Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Psalm 27 New Revised Standard Version

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh— my adversaries and foes— they shall stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident. One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. *For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.* Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord. Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! “Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, Lord, do I seek. Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation! If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up. Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence. I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

 Do you ever have songs that get stuck in your head? A few Sundays ago we sang the great hymn, O God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home. And I kept singing that part over and over again in my head. I think it resonated so much with me because we need a safe place, we need a shelter from the stormy blast. And we find that safe place right here.

One of the basic needs of every human being is shelter. And that shelter can look like a lot of different things. We might need physical shelter in the form of a place to hang our hats. We might need emotional shelter in the form of encouragement and affirmation amidst life’s struggles. We might need spiritual shelter in the form of a supportive faith community. Shelter is a gift of God’s grace which we can participate in bringing to the world.

Glennon Melton is an author, speaker, and blogger who writes Momastery and she wrote about returning to her college to speak to alumni and college students. As she walked through campus she remembered all the places she had struggled with eating disorders or abused alcohol or contemplated suicide. And as she walked, she became more confused and more afraid. Instead of being a homecoming or a celebration, instead of being a scene of hope and triumph, it was a scene of despair for her. It was a reminder for her of how sick she had been and a reminder that she didn’t know what to tell the college students there about how to fix it.

And as Glennon thought about her college experience, she realized that in college she learned that people need help and the people who need the most help are the ones too lost to ask for it. Glennon learned the importance of a net. We need a net: schools, churches, neighborhoods are nets, that is, groups of people who watch out closely for each other. Nets are people who notice when someone needs help. Nets are people who have the skills to really help when real help is needed. Nets are needed and we all need more of them. Glennon says even in families where there is a lot of love, there still needs to be a net.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Glennon says her net in college was the mental hospital, and growing up it was her third grade classroom, and now it is her Sunday School class. How can we create more nets? Remember, we cannot do this alone. It takes a village but we have to create our village.[[2]](#footnote-3) We have to have people who are our shelter. And we have to remember as the Psalm tells us that God is our shelter during troubling times. God will hide us in a secret place in God’s own tent, God will set us high, safe on a rock.

There are some of us who struggle daily with the need for shelter and we pray for God’s grace and love to shine into those shadows. I think of the homeless in our city, or those who are without work. I think of the millions around the world who had to flee their home in the darkness of night and have been made refugees. Those who have sought asylum in lands not their own, who are displaced, landless, or lost. I think of those who are frustrated, confused, those who are scraping by.

I think of those who are invisible to us. Those who live on the streets, each of whom has their own story. Some made bad decisions, some were victims, but none of them deserve what they have been left with. It seems like it is a reflection of our society that we say it is okay for people to live on the streets.

Have you ever felt invisible before? I think of the children in our city. 38% of our children live in poverty. Dallas has the highest rate of children’s poverty among cities with 1 million or more residents. The poor are the fastest growing segment of Dallas’ population, increasing 41% in the last 15 years. The poverty map of Dallas resembles a doughnut. In the south and west and pockets in the north and east have concentrated poverty, but there is a hole in the middle: downtown, the Park Cities, Preston Hollow and Lakewood that are an exception.[[3]](#footnote-4) We have “an island of haves in a sea of have-nots”.[[4]](#footnote-5)

We have learned today about a program to read with a student one-on-one, to make a difference in your life and in the life of a child. I hope that you will pray about making a commitment to make a difference in your life and in the life of a child in this city. This new program in the North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church is called One Plus One and it is about serving children, changing lives and transforming communities. In North Texas there are 300 Methodist churches in 21 counties that are pledging to engage with public schools and to make an impact in one-on-one relationships with children through reading, tutoring or mentoring. We are committed to transforming lives through education.  We can be the net that a child needs to succeed.

May we make some promises as we begin the new school year together. May we commit to worship regularly, may we commit to being a part of a small group here at Greenland Hills where we can find encouragement and support, and may we commit to making a difference through a one-on-one relationship with a child in our city. May we join with others to form nets to catch ourselves and to catch others.

As we make these promises, may we celebrate the new life that we will find as we commit to grow in our faith and in our relationships and in our service to God and to the world. We have experienced the promise of God’s enduring grace in our own lives. May we make promises to God. As we live out those promises, may we see glimpses of God’s grace and God’s steadfast love. God is offering us grace and calling us to move forward together.

There are rocks on the altar this morning. May these rocks and rocks that you encounter in your daily life serve as your own reminder of God’s presence and abiding love in the days, weeks, and years to come. May these rocks remind us of the promises we have made to bring forth God’s love in our own lives, in this community and in our world. May we be steadfast in our love, compassion and work for justice in the name of the One who is our Rock and our Redeemer, Amen.

1. Paragraphs about Glennon Melton article taken from: http://momastery.com/blog/2013/11/07/idea-title-im-even-sure-read-nets-well-call-nets/#sthash.f68MdGZZ.dpuf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
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3. Statistics about poverty in Dallas come from: http://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/latest-columns/20140818-poverty-is-eating-at-dallas-core.ece [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Statistics about poverty in Dallas come from: http://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/latest-columns/20140818-poverty-is-eating-at-dallas-core.ece [↑](#footnote-ref-5)