

Prayer: Lord God, sometimes I forget you. Sometimes I try to ignore you. But I do not want to face this scary world alone. And I thank you for never giving up on me, but pursuing me with your goodness and faithful love. Amen.

God: the unchanging “king of kings”

SATURDAY 3.21.20 Psalm 46:10-11, Revelation 17:9-14

The traditional *King James Version* translation of Psalm 46:10 is, “Be still.” But the Hebrew did not refer to going to a quiet mountain retreat. It was a call to say “enough” to our noisy inner fears, and with them silenced, to recognize God as our place of safety. At the end of the Bible, in visions packed with symbols, Revelation proclaimed Jesus’ final triumph over evil. In the first century, for Christians, the persecuting Roman Empire (Rome—the city on seven mountains, or hills) was evil incarnate. The vision gave Jesus a double title— “Lord of lords and King of kings.” It echoed a title Caesar often claimed. Jesus was king, not just over “little people,” but over all other kings, even over Caesar. He was, and is, “our place of safety.”

- “The basis for the Lamb’s victory in 17:14 is that ‘he is Lord of lords and King of kings’.... Just as the Babylonian king [in Daniel 4] was addressed by this title, so the king of latter-day Babylon (Rome) in John’s day was similarly addressed.... The Lamb exposes as false the divine claims of the emperor and others like him.” * Rome was hardly unique. Human rulers have often claimed divine approval or status (e.g. Nazi soldiers wore belt buckles that said, in German, “God is with us”). Many rulers today, formal or informal, claim exalted status for themselves. Do you trust that Jesus is “king of kings” over all of them? In what ways is that trust the foundation for the peace and hope in which we can live at all times?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are the King of kings, you are the Lord of lords. I cannot fully grasp all the reach of that, but I can and do ask you to be Lord of my life, to make me the person you want me to be. Amen.

Family Activity: Many people struggle with change, sometimes even fear it. As a family, name the four seasons, then invite each person to share what they like and dislike about each one. For example, the summer brings about more free time, but often high heat. The winter offers snow for sledding and snowball fights, but unsafe driving conditions. Take a moment to imagine what life would be like if you only experienced one season every day, all year long. What would you like about that? What would you miss? Remind one another that even though change can be difficult, we can often find good in the new experience or situation. Read Lamentations 3:22-23 and Hebrews 13:8 aloud, then thank God for being faithful through all of life’s changes. Pray for a heart and mind open to positive and healthy change.



GOBIN CHURCH
A United Methodist Community for All

**March 15, 2020 – Unafraid – Living with Courage and Hope
“The Sky is Falling”**

Scripture: Psalm 46 (selected verses)

God is our refuge and strength,

a help always near in times of great trouble.

That’s why we won’t be afraid when the world falls apart, when the mountains crumble into the center of the sea... Nations roar; kingdoms crumble. God utters his voice; the earth melts. The LORD of heavenly forces is with us! The God of Jacob is our place of safety... Be still, and know that I am God!

Praise to God, our dependable refuge and strength

MONDAY 3.16.20 Psalm 46:1-3, 113:1-8

Sometimes we say, with a wry smile, that in today’s world “the only constant is change.” But many times this idea brings us, not a smile, but deep-seated fear. That didn’t just start. In the psalms (Israel’s hymnbook), we find mention of the world falling apart, mountains crumbling and the sea (an ancient symbol of chaos and disorder) roaring and raging. But we also find the confidence that God is high over all the changes that cause us fear. God is always our refuge and strength.

- The psalms were positive that God was present with us at any time of fear, “always near in times of great trouble.” That trust was based on the faith that God is eternal (i.e. outside of time), a God we can praise “from now until forever from now!” Have you wrestled with the mind- stretching idea that, unlike us, God is not limited by time or space, but can be with us any place and any time? In what ways is that a strong antidote to fear of change?
- What experiences have you already had that made it feel as though your world was falling apart? Did you allow your faith in God to provide you with a stable place to stand as everything else seemed to be crumbling? What makes it valuable to build your trust in God before the next time when everything seems to fall apart?

Prayer: Lord God, I want to praise your name from sunrise to sunset because I genuinely trust that you are “high over all the nations.” Let my praise to you override my fear about any other realities. Amen.

God's ultimate purpose: unshaken goodness for all people

TUESDAY 3.17.20 Psalm 23:1-3, 96:10-13

The familiar *King James Version* rendering of Psalm 23:3 is “he restoreth my soul.” Along with “still waters,” it may sound to us like a day at a peaceful spa. But “he keeps me alive” (the *Common English Version's* translation) reflects the fact that for sheep, water and grass were not luxuries, but absolute necessities for survival. The Lord who ultimately rules over our world provides the things we need to keep our spiritual life always alive.

- Israel's neighbors worshipped a “council” of Canaanite gods who, they believed, played favorites and ruled the world unjustly (cf. Psalm 82:5). Psalm 96:10 set the one creator God against that idea. “In contrast to the unjust rule of the gods.... God's rule of justice and righteousness promises a stable and secure foundation.”
* What helps you to trust that God's eternal justice gives your life a stable and secure foundation?
- King David, who had been a shepherd (cf. 1 Samuel 17:34-36), likely composed Psalm 23. He described God as guiding him (and all God's children) “in proper paths.” Living as we do in a culture that places great store on our freedom to choose our own path in life, how easy or difficult do you find it to trust God to point to the proper paths for your life? How can confidence that you are on the proper path reduce your fear of change?

Prayer: King Jesus, truly, you rule! You rule the universe, including our world—yet you will rule my heart and life only if I ask you to. So please rule my life, and direct me in the proper paths. Amen.

Jesus: respect Caesar, in the context of God's kingdom

WEDNESDAY 3.18.20 Matthew 6:9-10, Mark 12:13-17

Jesus' enemies tried hard to ask him “no win” questions, for which either answer would get him in trouble. Taxes were as much or more a hot button then as they are today. But Jesus' answer said it wasn't as simple as a “yes” or “no” answer. There was indeed a valid realm for “Caesar” (human authority), and a citizen's duty to pay taxes fit into that. Yet God's kingdom was a larger realm, and in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus clearly indicated that God's kingdom commanded his (and our) ultimate loyalty.

- Rev. Matthew Simpson, in the funeral sermon for Abraham Lincoln in Springfield, IL, said: “To a minister who said he hoped the Lord was on our side, he replied that it gave him no concern whether the Lord was on our side or not. ‘For,’ he added, ‘I know the Lord is always on the side of right;’ and with deep feeling added, ‘But God is my witness that it is my constant anxiety and prayer that both myself and this nation should be on the Lord's side.’” * Do you think Lincoln was correct to resist assuming that God would automatically favor whatever he decided to do? How can you allow the Holy Spirit to guide you in discerning whether you are “on the Lord's side” of decisions in your life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, guide me to a clear sense of what my loyalty to you and your kingdom asks of me. Help me to respect earthly authorities, but never more highly than I respect your authority. Amen.

“We must obey God rather than humans!”

THURSDAY 3.19.20 Psalm 115:1-2, 9-11; Acts 5:17-29

Hebrew poets often used repetition to stress the most vital parts of their message. The triple repetition of “trust in the Lord” in Psalm 115 was an example of that. Jesus had warned his followers that, although they would face hostility from authorities, they should not fear those people (cf. Matthew 10:16-26). And when the highest religious authority in Jerusalem ordered them not to preach or teach about Jesus, the apostles trusted in the Lord and said, “We must obey God rather than humans!”

- Along with the three-fold call to “trust in the Lord,” Psalm 115 repeated a promise three times: “God is their help and shield.” We hear, and pray regularly, for followers of God who have lost jobs, been involved in accidents or been diagnosed with deadly diseases. In what sense is God still trustworthy at those times, still their help and shield? Have you ever seen trying times like that make trust in God even more meaningful to people?
- At the end of the gospel of Luke (of which Acts was “volume 2”), Jesus commissioned his disciples: “A change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in [Christ's] name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:47- 48). When the council and the high priest ordered them NOT to preach, they saw the obedience question as crystal clear. Have you ever had to decide whether to obey God or some human authority? If so, what did you decide to do?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, to your name, always, be the glory. Empower me to live a life that, in easy decisions and hard ones, glorifies you through my loyalty and obedience. Amen.

God: our place of safety even in the darkest valley

FRIDAY 3.20.20 Psalm 23:4-6, 46:4-7

The expression of trust in Psalm 23 did not promise that God's people would never face painful, “dark valley” experiences. In fact, in common with other Biblical passages (e.g. Isaiah 43:3), it assumed that such times would come into all lives. The value the psalmists saw in trusting God lay not in being able to avoid pain and sadness, but in having God with us even in the darkest of times.

- Psalm 46:4 is poetry, not geography. “There is no river in Jerusalem. The river here is a symbol of life-giving power, in contrast to the threatening waters and waves of Psalm 46:3.” * How did that psalm set the stage for Jesus' dramatic claim: “On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and shouted, ‘All who are thirsty should come to me! All who believe in me should drink! As the scriptures said concerning me, ‘Rivers of living water will flow out from within him’” (John 7:37-38)? In what ways has Jesus quenched your inner thirst?
- We most often think something “pursuing us” is bad. Psalm 23 reversed that, saying, “goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life.” Were there times when you, like so many of us, tried to ignore or avoid God's presence? In what ways have God's goodness and faithful love pursued you even if you were trying to get away from them?

