

## *Sunday Devotion*

*March 15, 2020*  
*Find a quiet place by yourself*

*CALL TO WORSHIP* based on Psalm 27

God is our light and our salvation; whom shall we fear?  
God is our shelter and refuge on the days of trouble,  
and our hope and joy on the days of celebration!

Day after day, we seek God's face and the assurance of God's holy love:  
O God, do not turn from us or hide your face from us!  
Be our guide and our light instead!

One thing we ask of God:

That we may live in God's dwelling place all the days of our life,  
and never cease to behold the beauty of God's home.

Enter this worship in thanksgiving,  
for God is among and within us!  
Thanks be to God!

### *PRAYER OF INVOCATION*

Gracious God,

Into the shadows of our isolation you speak words of life and community. Challenger of our lives, you call us from places we call home to lead us more deeply into the world you love. With your gentle, healing touch you redeem the broken places of our lives and you heal the wounded places of the earth. Inspire my worship here this day, so that I may receive liberation in your word, and be filled to overflowing to share your reconciling love throughout the earth. In Jesus I pray, Amen.

*SCRIPTURE* As you read the following passage, what words stand out to you? What don't you understand? What words do you want to hold close? Why might these words have been important to the author? To a loved one? To a stranger? Who would you want to share these words with? Why?  
Psalm 91

<sup>1</sup> You who live in the shelter of the Most High,  
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,

<sup>2</sup> will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;  
my God, in whom I trust."

<sup>3</sup> For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler  
and from the deadly pestilence;

- <sup>4</sup> he will cover you with his pinions,  
and under his wings you will find refuge;  
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
- <sup>5</sup> You will not fear the terror of the night,  
or the arrow that flies by day,
- <sup>6</sup> or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,  
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.
- <sup>7</sup> A thousand may fall at your side,  
ten thousand at your right hand,  
but it will not come near you.
- <sup>8</sup> You will only look with your eyes  
and see the punishment of the wicked.
- <sup>9</sup> Because you have made the Lord your refuge,  
the Most High your dwelling place,
- <sup>10</sup> no evil shall befall you,  
no scourge come near your tent.
- <sup>11</sup> For he will command his angels concerning you  
to guard you in all your ways.
- <sup>12</sup> On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.
- <sup>13</sup> You will tread on the lion and the adder,  
the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.
- <sup>14</sup> Those who love me, I will deliver;  
I will protect those who know my name.
- <sup>15</sup> When they call to me, I will answer them;  
I will be with them in trouble,  
I will rescue them and honor them.
- <sup>16</sup> With long life I will satisfy them,  
and show them my salvation.

### *MEDITATION*

What a week this has been! COVID-19 (Coronavirus) has put our country – our world – into a tailspin. It didn't just start this week, but with the ever increasing spread of this disease and declaring it a pandemic, fear is setting in. And why not? With the plummeting stock market, school closings, cancelation of March Madness, and the Philadelphia Orchestra playing their final performance to 2,500 empty seats, it's no surprise people are getting anxious if not downright frightened. I mean, when they close Disneyland, there's got to be reason for concern!

What do we do when we get scared? Well, many start to panic. Just try to find any cleaning product at the grocery store not to mention spaghetti sauce or peanut butter and you get a taste of the pandemonium that is setting in, created even by Bible-fearing people who I suspect have stock-piled enough toilet paper to last until 2045.

Yes, we are living in fearful times, but this is not new. Oh, maybe the reason for the angst is new with this new strain of virus, but disease, hardship, even empty food shelves have happened before. It does feel weird to be here in the church all alone and to know that there won't be services here tomorrow. But that, too has happened before. Usually, it's due to some sort of weather related storm, not a viral "storm."

Psalm 91 is just one example of scripture's response to fear. It is thought to have been written as a prayer for use by pilgrims who may have, for many reasons, feared their journey.

The truth is fear is a natural human emotion. Like the ability to feel pain, fear can be a good thing. I was reading an article posted in "The Purpose Dweller Project" that said fear is not something to be ashamed of, ignored, or condemned. Rather it's a healthy emotion created by God. When we are scared, we slow down, become cautious, pay attention.

It's the *perfect* time to pray. This is exactly the purpose of Psalm 91. It is a prayer to check in with the one who is Creator and Sustainer. So much of the time we go through our day to day managing much on our own. We live in a culture that promotes self-sufficiency. Fear comes in when things get out of our control. Psalm 91 wants the reader to remember that God is in fact in control. God has not abandoned us. God will protect us.

Did you know that "Do not fear" is the most repeated commandment? It is used more often even than "Love your neighbor" or "You shall have no other gods before me." I tried to find out the exact number of times it is used. I couldn't find the answer online and when I tried to count myself using my Bible concordance, I gave up after 42 when I hadn't gotten past the Old Testament book of 1 Chronicles – that's only 13 books into the Bible out of 66, in case you were wondering. Finding the exact number of uses of this command could be something you might do to fill up your time, or that of your out-of-school children while you are in self-isolation.

Several people suggested that this command to "Fear not" is found 365 times in the Bible, one for each day of the year. One person said the actual number is 366 so that leap year is included. Whatever the number, it's a lot and whenever it has been used it's usually a sign that there is something going on that would be worthy of fear. Again, I don't think fear is a bad thing, but it can also be something that the God who said, "Remember, I am with you always." can and will do something amazing even if it is just to get us to stop and remember.

So maybe fear is a good thing when it causes us to pause, say a prayer, humble our hearts and seek God's will and then figuring out how *we* are called to be a part of it. Again, one thing about that command to "fear not" is that God is doing something to help calm our fears and often that includes the involvement of others. Author, seminary educator and pastor, Mary Luti, shared the idea that it's at times like this, when people are scared, that we can hold fast to our faith, trusting in God's control and then be God's agents in the midst of fear. Her suggestion, as God's faithful agents, is to adopt kindness and patience when stress and tempers are raging.

In many ways we are like those pilgrims who prayed Psalm 91, we are on a journey. It isn't one that put us on a plane or (heaven forbid) a cruise ship. It's a life journey that has us traversing this troubled landscape. We aren't traveling alone, but even as we find ourselves removed from our social outlets and normal workspace, we are in this together. So let's think of ways that we can help calm our own fears and that of our neighbor by reaching out and showing the world how God is still with us in meaningful and concrete ways. Here are some suggestions. Remember especially folks who live alone. Reach out and make connections by phone calls, emails, texts or the old fashioned tried and true method – write and mail a note or card.

Remember there are people who are low-wage workers employed by businesses, particularly in the service industry, who could lose work or face months without pay. While you are at the grocery store stocking up, how about getting some extra and taking it to the food pantry. They are going to be overwhelmed by need at this time. They especially need the following:

- Protein: Canned meats such as tuna, chicken, and salmon. Beans, canned or dried. Split peas and lentils. Peanut butter.
- Grains: Pasta, rice, or quinoa. Oatmeal or breakfast cereals (whole grain or low sugar).
- Dairy: Shelf stable milk, non-fat dried powder milk, or dry-grated Parmesan cheese.
- Prepared Meals: Pasta sauces, hearty soups, stews, canned pasta, baked beans, or Mac & Cheese.
- Fruits: Canned fruit in its own juice or 100% fruit juice.
- Vegetables: Especially carrots, potatoes, yams, or tomatoes.
- Baking Goods: Cake mix, flour, or sugar.
- Fresh Produce: Onions, garlic, oranges, carrots, potatoes, sweet potatoes, apples, pears, bananas, or other produce that does not require refrigeration.
- Other Items: Olive oil, canola oil, broths, lemon juice, or vinegar. Spices such as pepper, cinnamon, oregano, parsley, or chili powder. Healthy snacks like nuts or crackers. Condiments, such as ketchup, mayo, or salad dressing.

The Doylestown food pantry is located at 470 Old Dublin Pike, Doylestown. If you can't get there, I'll be more than happy to get it from you and do the delivery myself. Remember, with the schools closed, the children who receive free or subsidized breakfasts and lunch could have their access to steady meals compromised. Help is needed.

If you can't help with food, think of what you can do even in this fearful time. Let's share ideas of ways that we can help others during this time. Call the church office and leave a message. I'll be checking them and will then share any new ideas that are received. If nothing else, be a voice of calm and hope, a light in the darkness. Let your little light shine!!

#### *SCRIPTURE*

Romans 8:31-39

<sup>31</sup> What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? <sup>33</sup> Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. <sup>35</sup> Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all day long;  
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”

<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

#### *PRAYER*

Lord, we are constantly reminded that there is no place where you are not with us. We know that there is no moment that is too scary to feel your presence. We know we are never alone. We celebrate that there is no alley, no hospital room, no bedroom, no office, or no street corner that is too dark for you.

You tell us not to be afraid of what the future holds, not to worry about tomorrow, but you know how difficult we find it to heed your words. For we worry about so many things, our families, our friends, our circumstances, some worries big worries, most worries tiny aggravations. We come before you this day with these big and tiny worries, and with confidence we know we can lay them all at your feet.

We bring our big worries about health and happiness and security for ourselves and for our loved ones. We bring big worries about the world we live in, about the way people in our world are treated as less than human, cast outs, exploited, tortured, helpless and abused... *(add your own "big worries")*

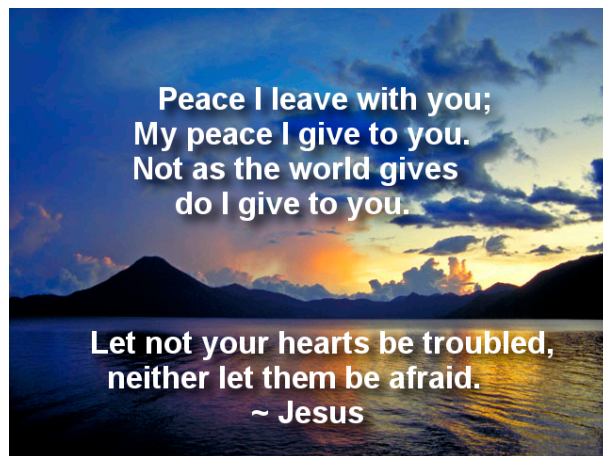
Great God, we know that you are concerned with every aspect of our lives, so we also bring the little things that concern us, the worries which keep us awake at night, the worries which only you know... *(add your own "little worries")*

Living God, reach out to all those for whom the future brings fears and uncertainties. Assure them that you are with them, even when that future seems dark and circumstances feel like they are spiraling out of control. Remind them that you are able to transform even the bleakest of situations, bring healing and wholeness.

Lord we make our prayers in faith, for we know that your Spirit is at work in our world making all things new. Amen.

#### *BENEDICTION*

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, remain in your heart and mind in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you always. Amen.



I commend to you this sung benediction that can be found at this online link:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eve2y-P-Zjk>

*Please know that while we are not together physically, our spirits are joined together in the love of Jesus Christ our Lord. You are all in my thoughts and prayers and I look forward to the day when we can give each other a big hug!*

# CHILDREN'S LESSON (of whatever age)

With so much upheaval in our lives right now, children might be confused or even fearful. This is a way to get them thinking about emotions and how emotions aren't good or bad, they are just feelings and God welcomes and cares for all of them. God promises no matter what, God will be with us.

READ Philippians 4:6-7

"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."

IDEA – *You can take anything that is on your mind and share it with God in prayer. God will listen. God will help.*

## MAKE PRETZELS (OR PANCAKES)

Pretzels were first formed to remind us of hands and arms folded in prayer. First known by their Latin name, *bracellae*, or "little arms," the name then became *bretzel* and is now *pretzel*.

- \* Mix 1 packet (1 teaspoon) yeast and  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup warm water.
- \* Add 1 Tablespoon sugar, 1 Tablespoon oil, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt.
- \* Mix in 2 cups plain flour.
- \* Knead and form into pretzels, folding ends over in praying formation.
- \* Place on foil and brush tops with beaten egg; sprinkle with coarse salt.
- \* Bake 10 minutes at 425 degrees.

EXPLORE FEELINGS (*This idea originated in Delia Halverson's book "Children's Activities for the Christian Year"*)

Ask children to look up the following scriptures and answer how Jesus might have felt in the particular situations. You can write or draw. Remember Jesus was fully human as well as divine, so you will be thinking about human feelings. There are no wrong answers.

*Luke 2:41-50*

What do you think Jesus' parents were thinking when they couldn't find Jesus?

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What do you think Jesus felt when his parents were angry with him for not staying with them?

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*Luke 8:22-25*

What do you think the disciples were thinking when they found Jesus asleep during the storm?

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What do you think Jesus was feeling when the disciples woke him up from his nap?

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*Matthew 21:12-13*

When Jesus saw the confusion in the Temple, he might have felt \_\_\_\_\_

*Matthew 26:6-13*

The woman in this story anointed Jesus' head, which was considered an act that might be done for a king. What feelings do you suppose he had for the woman?

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How do you think he felt when the disciples spoke against the woman? \_\_\_\_\_

*Luke 19:28-40*

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, he might have felt \_\_\_\_\_

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*Luke 19:41-44*

As Jesus looked over Jerusalem, he might have felt \_\_\_\_\_

*Mark 14:32-42*

How might Jesus have felt as he prayed about the events he knew were ahead of him?

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When Jesus found his friends asleep instead of praying, how do you suppose he felt?

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*Luke 22:14-16*

What sort of feelings do you suppose Jesus had as they began their meal?

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*Luke 22:24-34*

Look for several feelings that Jesus might have had at this time.

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*Matthew 26:47-56*

Jesus might have had several feelings during this time. What might they have been?

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WRITE OR DRAW "I WONDER" LETTERS TO GOD

Children should think about some questions they may have about life and feelings they have. The letters they write should be as if they are talking to God. Tell them their letters are a type of prayer. When you are finished, eat your pretzels!