

God of the living, through baptism we pass from the shadow of death to the light of the resurrection. Through your written word, reveal your living Word, Jesus the Christ, that we may hear anew your message of salvation. Remain with us and give us hope that, rejoicing in the gift of the Spirit who gives life to our mortal flesh, we may be clothed with the garment of immortality, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Luke 4:1-13

4:1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 4:2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.

4:3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."

4:4 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

4:5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.

4:6 And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please.

4:7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."

4:8 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

4:9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,

4:10 for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,'

4:11 and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

4:12 Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

4:13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Lent: During this season we will focus our hearts and minds on the Psalm of each Sunday. After all psalms are the hymnbook of the Bible. They were meant to be sung and prayed. They are also then our prayer book. Noted Psalm scholar Walter Brueggemann asserts that there are three types of Psalms: Psalms of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. Isn't the life of faith like that, too? We have times of orientation, disorientation, and re-orientation. I had the privilege to study the Psalms with Dr. Brueggemann, 20 years ago now!

1. When we want to praise God for the goodness of the world, but have inadequate words, we might recite from heart, Psalm 8

1 O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens...

This is a Psalm of Orientation.

2. When we are in trouble or in harm's way, we can be honest with God, even voice our anger, our complaints to God. We may pray through Psalm 86

¹ Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.

² Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you; save your servant who trusts in you.

This is a Psalm of Disorientation.

3. A Psalm of Re-orientation, after a crisis, would be Psalm 91.

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

91:1 You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,

91:2 will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."

91:9 Because you have made the LORD your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place,

91:10 no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.

91:11 For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

91:12 On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.

91:13 You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.

91:14 Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name.

91:15 When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them.

91:16 With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.

Proclamation of the Word

Last week a few of our Sr. High youth gathered around our kitchen table. The urgent business was the naming of the new youth space down below- the size of a modest home. "Youth Room" is what we have called it in the past. Not very creative, but it gets the point across. But this is a new space, one that the youth can name and put their own mark on. So a few of the Sr. Highs gathered to bat around a list of ideas.

Some were biblical: cornerstone, the foundation...as in Christ is our cornerstone, a strong foundation.

Some were trendy: the well, the den as in Bobcats, Panthers, Lions, and Tigers and Bears have dens. Others relate to the fact that it is in the ground level of a church that is called a fort sitting on a hill. So the ideas came: the keep, the dungeon.

One that stuck out and caught some ground was "The Refuge." A refuge is biblical. It is a safe place, a shelter from the storm of adolescence and the world outside. We found a verse, Psalm 91:2

"I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."

After all that is our mission to draw young people into a trusting relationship with God and one another. It even has the word "fort" in it. This one had possibility.

The names were taken to the Mid-Highs and Sr. Highs for a vote. The winner....drum roll please.... "The Den."

A den is a home. A den is safe. It is where you gather with your family whether you are a lion, a tiger, a bear, or a teenager. A den is refuge, shelter, a place to be gathered under God's protective wing. Sounds pretty good.

Adolescence is a time of tremendous dis-orientation, is it not? And we all have those times of disorientation where we long for life to come back into balance, to be on the other side of the crisis, to feel secure, safe, at peace. The best image for that safety is found in verse 4, *Psalm 91:4 He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge.*

We do not need to be thirteen to understand how it feels to want that kind of security and protection. A *Candid Camera* episode a few years ago illustrates this.ⁱ A trucker was asked on hidden camera on the old TV show, if he could be any age, what age would he be?

Would the man might say 65, so he could trade in his semi for a fishing boat and relax or maybe he might wish to be young- footloose and fancy free again, say 19. But the man did not say 65 or 19. He said three. "I would be three again." He said, "Then I wouldn't have any responsibilities."

Three. An age where most feel like mom and dad take care of everything. They make sure the doors are locked so you can sleep soundly and securely. At age three, you do not have to worry about fixing the leak under the house, or filing your taxes, or running out of grocery money. Three. Of course, you just get tucked in at night with a story read, prayers said, and the hmmm of the dryer running down the hall. Age three is a time of orientation, to use the term Brueggemann uses. Troubles have not yet come.

While doing my Clinical Pastoral education at St. Joseph's hospital in Atlanta during seminary I would meet with my supervisor, a Catholic nun serving as hospital chaplain. She would counsel me as one preparing to counsel others in hospital rooms. Once she asked a question, "What is your earliest memory of having to grow up, to let go of the security of childhood?" Easy, I said, as tears welled up in

my eyes. The day two men in dark blue uniforms rang the front doorbell. No one ever came to the front door except salesmen. It was Sunday afternoon, April 24, 1977. The two men from the U.S. Air Force came to tell my parents that my brother, Les, was killed in a motorcycle wreck near Dyess Air Force base in Texas the night before. He was 21 years old. He had been drinking too much and drove off the road and hit an embankment with his girlfriend, Elizabeth, riding on the back of the motorcycle. Neither lived. I remember being aged six and realizing how fragile life is and how dangerous the world could be, not to mention the suffering this caused for my family.

Even adults want to return to a sense of security and shelter because life has troubles. A pathology report comes back with a false positive, causing a biopsy to be needed, and in the meantime you hold your breath and hold your loved ones, hoping for the best.

A soldier witnesses and participates in the horrors of war.

And this week, beautiful young woman, Emily Faris, died in her sleep in her dorm room. She was a child of Bethesda Presbyterian Church in York, SC. She used to babysit the Bob and Eva Williamson's grandchildren.

Yes, when awful things happen, age three looks pretty good.

The Psalmist sings, *He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge.*

Is that not what we want much of the time? Someone else is in charge, always on guard, sending angels to attend us and protect us. This Psalm is an assurance of faith and trust for us.

Dr. Cornelius Platinga of Calvin Institute of Worshipⁱⁱ illustrates:

In one of his books John Timmer tells of his experience as a boy in the Netherlands at the start of World War II. German troops had invaded Holland a few days before, but nobody knew just what to expect. Then, on the second Sunday of May, 1940, as the Timmer family was sitting around the dinner table in their home in Haarlem, suddenly they heard the air-raid siren and then the droning of German bombers.

Of course, everybody was scared out of their minds. "Let's go stand in the hallway," John's father said. "They say it's the safest place in the house." In the hall John's father said, "Why don't we pray? There's nothing else we can do."

John Timmer writes he has long ago forgotten the exact wording of his father's prayer—all except for one phrase. Somewhere in that prayer, Mr. Timmer, who was praying God to protect his family from Hitler's Luftwaffe—somewhere in that prayer he said, "O God, in the shadow of your wings we take refuge."

Platinga reflects,

It's a picture—God spreading his wings over us—it's a picture that all the Jewish and Christian generations have memorized and cherished, in part because the phrase invites us to recover our childhood feeling of security in the nest. Or, to discover it for the first time if we are working away from a terrorized childhood.

It's a special feeling and only a pretty numb Christian would fail to be touched by it.ⁱⁱⁱ

But what if, a Dutch family across town on that same Sunday in May, fervently prayed the same prayer, and their house was hit by Hitler's Luftwaffe, bombed to bits and members of the family died?

That is the question of evil and suffering that we all at one time or another must wrestle with. The world is filled with evil. Christians are not immune.

Should we just pray for angels to guard us and then never service our car or check the brake pads to make sure we are safe? Should we just pray and never wash our hands when we know about infectious diseases and how they spread? We cannot just smoke like a chimney and pray to never get lung cancer or ignore a travel advisory to Syria and hope our angels are surrounding us. The world is filled with dangers or to quote a Mighty Fortress is our God, "an though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us"

What troubles us most sometimes is that Christians are not immune from suffering. Platinga reflects on suffering this way:

If the children of God were always saved from floods like believing Noah and his family; if every time somebody pointed a gun at a Christian, the gun just turned to salami; if we really had a money-back guarantee against hatred, disease, and the acts of terrorists, then of course we wouldn't have to worry about church growth. Our churches would fill with people attracted to the faith for its benefit plan. These are people who want an insurance agent, not a church. For security they want Arnold Schwarzenegger, not God. We already have people becoming Christians because they want to get rich or get happy. What would happen to people's integrity if becoming a believer really did give you blanket protection against poverty, accidents, and the wages of sin?^{iv}

That is never the claim of our faith- immunity from trouble and testing. We read last week from the gospel of Matthew 6:34, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Jesus faced troubles and testing. The devil offered him power, security, and stuff, but Jesus refused. Jesus placed his trust in the one who sent him. He is steady and sure in the face of a Bible verse spouting devil. Did you catch that? Even the devil spouts scripture? Jesus is secure in the knowledge of who he is. Fresh from being baptized in the river Jordan, he is God's Beloved with whom God is well-pleased. Jesus knows who and whose he is.

But there is another time, hanging on a cross flanked by thieves, that Jesus voices a different kind of prayer with gut-wrenching honesty, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus is reciting Psalm 22, a psalm of disorientation.

These are the different kinds of prayers of the faithful. One voice in trouble and despair upon a cross, even Jesus himself voiced this kind of disorientation. But early in his ministry, when he was tested by the devil, Jesus voiced trust in the purposes of God. When the devil quotes Psalm 91,

for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Luke 4:10-12)

Psalm 91 is an affirmation of faith. Perhaps it is a celebration of faith after one has experienced the providential care of God. It is a shout out to God by one who has weathered a storm, been wounded, and found healing and peace on the other side. It is one side of the coin of faith.

Disorientation, re-orientation. Crying out in need and giving thanks after the storm. These are the different sides of the same coin. On our coins, it is written, "In God we trust." Ultimately, both kinds of prayers, are ones of trust. Troubles will come, but in what or in whom will you place your trust?

We believe...

Deep is the mystery of faith.

That somehow in the end, God's purposes are being worked out.

And we are those who take shelter in the able wings of God's grace and mercy even though we experience suffering and pain.

We are those who seek to love God, to serve God, even in the face of trouble, because we, like Jesus, have been claimed in the promises of Baptism.

We are called by name and beloved.

We are baptized into the life, death, and resurrection of God.

And nothing, not even death, can separate us from that love.

We have found in the embrace of God's wings we who were lost have been found again. For we know those wings, too, have stretched out to endure all the pain human kind can inflict in the humiliating death on a cross. Jesus was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, and yet....and yet....He was raised from the dead. And we will be raised with him. In God we trust.

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ⁱ Referred to in sermon by Cornelius Platinga, "The Wings of God" on Psalm 91. worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/the-wings-of-god-psalm-91-2

ⁱⁱ IBID.

ⁱⁱⁱ IBID.

^{iv} IBID.