

***By This***

**Laura Smith Conrad**

**Psalm 121 Assurance of God's Protection**

**May 19, 2019 Easter 5C**

**Fort Hill Presbyterian**

<sup>1</sup> I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?

<sup>2</sup> My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

<sup>3</sup> He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.

<sup>4</sup> He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

<sup>5</sup> The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand.

<sup>6</sup> The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

<sup>7</sup> The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.

<sup>8</sup> The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in  
from this time on and forevermore.

**John 13:31-35**

13:31 When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.

13:32 If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.

13:33 Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'

13:34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

13:35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

**Meditation**

I remember heading out the door of the house in high school. My mother would always give me the same reminders:

"Remember to be nice. Treat others how you wish to be treated. Use your manners."

Before bed she would say, "Did you remember to brush your teeth and say your prayers?"

Heading off to college it was, "Remember who you are and where you came from."

The day of my wedding it was, "Remember, I will always love you. You were mine first."

People say those final things at the threshold of the door, or dorm, or before walking down the aisle. People who love us usually have some parting words.

Jesus has a farewell speech in the gospel of John.

These few verses we read are part of that last sermon.

Jesus has fed his disciples at the last supper.

Everyone has clean feet.

Jesus' hands are puckered from washing their feet.

He even has shared with Judas, the one who will betray him. Jesus loves Judas anyway. Then Judas slinked off into the night.

Jesus washes the feet of Peter, the one who will deny him three times.

But he loves and serves him anyway.

Jesus starts his farewell speech, by saying, "Little children, love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples."

And he just goes on and on for four chapters, saying, I am going away and you cannot go with me. But I am preparing a place for you, a home with God. I'll be gone awhile...

**But in the meantime, here are the keys, folks. You are in charge.**

Do you remember the first time you were left in charge?

Maybe you were an eldest child and had to watch your younger siblings sometimes.

I was the youngest child, but I was a babysitter for a few of families when the parents would go out.

I had my babysitter routine.

The kids might be excited, and then they get anxious wondering about their parents thinking, "Will they ever come back?"

So as a babysitter, you have a game, a plan, an activity to keep their minds off of it.

You cook them that frozen pizza left for you.

You read them books to take their minds off of their missing their parents.

This was the days before movies on demand.

But as the night goes on the kids would get crankier and crankier.

"Are they coming home soon? When will they be home?"

Then some kids used delay tactics, refusing to go to bed.

The preacher's son would ask lots of questions and pray really long prayers, just to put off going to sleep.

Maybe we all have an innate fear of being orphaned by our parents.

Have you ever noticed that most Disney main characters are orphans?

There is Simba in the Lion King, Mowgli in the Jungle Book, Cinderella, Bambi, and Elsa in Frozen.

Those stories are all about a child taking on the responsibilities of adulthood.

I guess Jesus knew we would get anxious, too, as he departs.

So he had some words for his disciples before he left them.

He promised that eventually he would return.

They thought Jesus was coming back soon.

They probably thought that meant weeks or months.

But those years have turned into almost 2000 years.

The promise of the Spirit was not the same as the living, breathing Jesus.

So in the meantime, Jesus says, you are in charge of taking care of each other in my absence. Love one another.

Now all of us have become the eldest child or the babysitter, left to handle things until Jesus' final return. AND

We are all God's children taking on the responsibilities of mature adulthood.

Today our graduates are on that kind of threshold, leaving one part of life behind and moving into a new phase of life.

And these words of Jesus are for you, your parents, and all of us, coming and going, in times of transition.

Remember Psalm 121 speaks of God's protection as you go and come.

That does not mean that there will not be lonely or scary times ahead, but know God is with you.

And if you lose your way, look up. Lift your eyes to the hills...look up.

The Lord is your keeper. Remember that.

The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in.

That line always makes me think of the goal keeper in soccer.

The one watching intensely.

Sometimes the goal keeper looks like the least busy player on the team, but she is always prepared to act when it is time, protecting the goal.

The Lord is your keeper. Keeping you from evil, keeping your life.

Always ready to protect. But keeping your eyes on God, lifted up, will keep you on good path. Like your parents, God desires the best for you without harm.

Jesus goes even further with his final things speech.

He says love one another, as I have loved you.

That AS is a big deal. Love AS Jesus has loved us.

Love with a sacrificial, selfless love.

Be his love in the world.

Real love seeks the well-being of others, risks, and shares.

Sometimes the world will demand you get all you can, use people for your own purpose, and get ahead at all cost.

Jesus says, "Love one another as I have loved you. You are mine. Eat together. Get on your knees and serve."

...like some of us did Friday at the Rise Against Hunger event: don a hairnet and pack up 40,000 meals for children who have nothing to eat.

Let your heart be broken by the things that break God's heart.  
We are the ones Jesus left to care for all God's children.

Graduates, you have experienced Christ-like love of your faith families, this church and those before us. Your parents have shown you real love, sacrificial love. I am sure they have messed up, but they have tried to do their best.

As our kids were growing up, they would sometimes tell us when we got it wrong. So kind of them to point our mistakes out. Chuck or I would say, "You can talk about that with your therapist someday. We have to give you some material to work with."

Parents have had days full of worry and sleepless nights. They have re-arranged things to be there for you. They have denied themselves some things to provide for your care. They have changed your diapers and put up with your temper tantrums, whether you were two or twelve. Alexis, Carter, Trent, and Benton, I know they love you with the love of God.

The kind of love Jesus has for his disciples- in the face of Judas' betrayal, Peter's denying knowing him, and all of them falling asleep on him when he needed them, he loves. He fed them at the Last Supper and washed their stinky feet to show them that he loves them anyway and in spite of what they do. God's love is unconditional. This is how we are called to love each other.

In the book *Out of Africa*, Isak Dinesen tells the story about a boy named Kitau. He appeared at the author's door one day asking for work as a domestic servant. Dinesen hired Kitau, but was surprised that after three months, he asked her for a letter of recommendation to go work for Sheik Ali, a Muslim who lived in a nearby town. Dinesen offered to

raise Kitau's pay to keep him, but money was not what interested him. Kitau had decided either to become a Christian or a Muslim, and his purpose for working for Dinesan was to see up close, the way a Christian lived. Now that he had worked for her and seen the ways of Christians, he would go live with Sheik Ali and see how Muslims behave; then he would decide. Dinesan remembers how she wished Kitau had told her that before he came to live with her.

So I wonder how people we live with or work with or play on a team with would know we are Christians. Would they see from how we treated others that Jesus is our Lord and our friend?

I sometimes think the church with our bickering and fighting has compromised our witness to Christ. With or splits and squabbles, or in history, our killing each other like Catholics and Protestants. We harm our witness.

Other times I have seen the church be so loving, working through disagreements with faith in Jesus Christ and trusting in the Holy Spirit. The church at its best loving as Jesus loves.

Jesus said, I am going away, and where I am going you cannot come.  
 But I will not leave you orphaned or alone.  
 In the meantime, you are in charge.  
 It's time to take on responsibility, be my hands and feet.  
 The world will know you are Christians by your love.

Jesus actually said, "By this, they will know you are my disciples."  
 By this.  
 Our witness to others is based on THIS.  
 Jesus did not say they will know you are my disciples by what you believe.  
 Not by how well you know the Bible.  
 Not by whether you follow all the Fort Hill Faith Practices.  
 By this. Love another as I have loved you.

#### BENEDICTION

Love one another as Jesus has loved us.  
 By this all will know you belong to me.  
 Duh!  
 It's just that easy, and just that hard.  
 So go, trusting in the One who loves you, the Son who redeems you, and the Holy Spirit who will live and love through you.