

Sermon for Sunday, March 10, 2019 - "Dwelling in God"

First Sunday in Lent
March 10, 2019
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

Preaching text: Psalm 91

You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty—

²you will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my stronghold, my God in whom I put my trust."

⁹Because you have made the Lord your refuge, and the Most High your habitation,

¹⁰no evil will befall you, nor shall affliction come near your dwelling.

¹¹For God will give the angels charge over you, to guard you in all your ways.

¹²Upon their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.

¹³You will tread upon the lion cub and viper; you will trample down the lion and the serpent.

¹⁴I will deliver those who cling to me; I will uphold them, because they know my name.

¹⁵They will call me, and I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble; I will rescue and honor them.

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

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Our Psalm today asks us to reflect on where we find our home. With the poetic words like "dwell, abide, make our habitation, take refuge," we are called to find our home in God.

That can sound pretty abstract; besides God is a being, not a place. Yet we do experience a sense of home with other beings, quite often in human relationships. There are some people - when we're with them, it just feels like home. We can let down and breathe more easily. The masks can come off. There are some people - when we're with them we feel safer, stronger, more able to face whatever life throws at us. There are some people who help us know that we belong, no matter what - that we have a place in this world.

I remember when this began to happen for me in the early days of my marriage. My husband Matt and I had just arrived in Tanzania for a preaching fellowship and nothing was working. We got locked into our student housing unit where there was no running water and no way to cook. There were all sorts of communication issues and we felt very unwelcome at the seminary where we'd planned to do our work. We couldn't easily access food or what we needed for research. After another hungry, sleepless night watching giant cockroaches race around the crumbling walls of our house, I thought maybe we should catch the next plane home - if we could get the door unlocked, that is. "I just want to go home," I kept saying. Matt reached out his hand, looked me straight in the eyes and responded, "We have to be home for each other now."

That sounded crazy at the time. Yet it has become a guiding image for me in marriage. Our commitment to each other provides some refuge amidst all that life throws at us. It has helped us to face the challenges of that time in Tanzania, a miscarriage, tragic deaths, moves, floods, family

mental health issues and the daily grind of life. I am so grateful for this, especially as I'm very aware that isn't the case in all marriages.

Yet, so many relationships can provide a sense of home for us. A friend who knows so many of your faults and delights in you because of them, a family member who reminds you of the wisdom your family has given you, the church congregation that is a refuge for you through all the trials of life - we can experience safety, peace and belonging in relationship with others.

And those are just glimpses of what it is to find a home in God. In God, the masks can come off for good, for we are fully known and fully loved. We don't have to do anything to earn God's love. God knows everything about us and delights in us always. God has claimed us as beloved children, we belong to God. In God, we can breathe easily knowing that God's breath, the Holy Spirit, breathes in us.

This home in God is secure now and always. All of our human relationships will end - and too quickly. That's part of what's so devastating about the death of a loved one - a sense of refuge and belonging dies with them. And, even the most beautiful human relationships are marred by sin and brokenness.

Yet, when we dwell in God, as the Psalm says, no evil will befall us, nor shall affliction come near our dwelling. Many have interpreted this to mean that if we trust in God, then we will be completely safe and free from harm always. Sometimes people even tell us that if we are suffering, we must not have enough faith. That is just not true. The witness of scripture contradicts that claim, again and again. Our lived experience as people of faith contradicts that again and again.

God's people are not spared from harm. Rather, God is our refuge in the midst of trouble. The promise of this Psalm is not so much that our earthly home will be protected, but that our dwelling in God will not be harmed by evil or affliction because God is faithful. We belong to God always.

God has gone to great lengths to help us know that we have this home - even coming to dwell with us here in Jesus who shared all that we face - temptations, wilderness times, even death. Yet in the resurrection we see that nothing, not even death, can stop God from dwelling with us and calling us home.

This home in God provides comfort and refuge but it isn't intended to let us escape. We don't get to just put our feet up on the couch in this home and ignore the rest of the world. Instead, the experience of home that God gives us is intended to send us out into this hurting world that God so loves.

We are sent to be a refuge, *amparo* in Spanish, for others - sent to join God in the work of assuring that all people have shelter, food, water, safety and belonging.

In this season of Lent, we hear God's invitation to return home, to find security, not in what is fleeting but in what is eternal—God's abiding love.

As we make our home in God, may the love of God dwelling in us become a place of security and refuge for all those we encounter.

Amen.

