

May 10, 2020 – Mother's Day sermon

Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

A Mother's Faith

Our psalm today fits what we're experiencing now - alternating between cries for help, expressions of pain and fear, and trust and praise. Psalm 31 is a lament – or a prayer for help - and there are more laments than any other type of psalm.

Right now we are dealing with a lot of loss – lamenting loss of our very way of life, loss of loved ones, and loss of our rituals. Have you celebrated a birthday on zoom yet? Maybe someone you know has lost a wedding or graduation or prom that isn't going to happen as planned.

We acknowledge that Mother's Day can be a challenging day for some; it is difficult for many, as we try to connect without gathering together.

Today as we honor and celebrate our mothers, I also want to share a message of hope with you. Hope that we can take a long view of life and rely on God during times of suffering.

As children, we turn to our mothers for help and safety. Even as an adult we often call Mom for help with a recipe, a situation, or advice, right? I remember when I was a young parent, our extended family couldn't agree on how to celebrate Christmas – gifts, no gifts, when, where - you know. Mom said what was most important was to stay in good relationship – that some day in years to come we might really be glad for that. She took the long view.

My brothers and sisters and I are so blessed by our mother, and her faith.

- She taught us to say grace at meals and prayers at bedtime
- To be kind and loving to others
- To help when we can

Mom also keeps us all connected. She sends each of us a note or card every week! **Every week** since I went to college. Moms have a long view. They look to the future.

All throughout the Bible we see examples of how God brought good out of difficult situations – and often it took decades. God has a long view, too.

Our text today tells us to have hope, and trust in God in the midst of troubles. Psalm 31 is - a lament psalm. All laments contain a complaint, a cry to God for rescue, and an expression of trust and praise. We don't know the specifics here, but scholars

suggest that the lament psalms are purposely vague about circumstances, so we can use them as prayers for a variety of situations when we struggle.

Psalm 31 is also one of the longest lament psalms. In fact, it is put together like 2 separate laments - verses 1-8 are a complete prayer, as are 9-13. John Goldingay wrote a book about psalms, and he titled his chapter on this psalm “when a prayer needs to be prayed twice!” Right now, we may all feel we need to prayer our prayers at least twice!

An important theme here is rescue or refuge - protection from danger and distress. The author turns for help to God - our refuge, our strong fortress, our rock.

God as our refuge means that even in the midst of trouble and difficulties, we trust our life and future to God. This psalm also contains the last seven words Jesus said from the cross, “into your hand I commit my spirit.” It’s about trust. Trusting that we can turn our life over to God, and into God’s hands. Our troubled times – our difficult times are in God’s hands.

Even this coronavirus pandemic time. Psalm 31 reminds us to have faith and take a long view of life, relying on God to get us through.

Have you noticed any *good* things that are unexpectedly happening now?

- Many of us have more time with our families
- We’re doing more cooking and eating together, more yard work and home projects
- Some have more time to rest – maybe, time to read a new book, practice an instrument, play games or pick up a hobby. All good.
- There’s also been dramatic improvement in our global environment that’s happened in just 7 weeks!

And there is so much good coming from those who are working to help – EMT’s, pharmacists, grocery store employees, and hospital staff who are not just doing their jobs, but also filling in for family, being kind and loving to people who are sick and alone. Have you noticed their sacrifices make us all feel grateful, and want to follow their lead and do kind things for others?

If we take the long view, who knows what really good things are ahead of us? New ways to learn, to worship, and connect with other people. New neighborliness.

A few weeks ago, I read a story in the *United Methodist News* about centenarian Lucille Ellson - born just a few weeks prior to the 1918 flu pandemic. Ellson is a

lifelong Methodist, who's lived through tough times – the Great Depression, WWII, family health challenges, and she even survived coronavirus.

Ellson was supposed to get married in July of 1942, but had to wait more than a year because of Pearl Harbor. Floyd Ellson was enlisted in the navy, and Lucille stayed to teach in Iowa. She remembers that plumbers were out of work and all metal went to the war effort. Businesses were closed. People left her town to head west for jobs, and the shelves in the grocery store were empty.

In a recent interview with the *Washington Post*, Ellson shared her advice for getting through a tough time: “I would tell people to not get stressed about planning far ahead. You can't do it. A long time ago, I started making a list every morning of what I had to do. It was the only thing I could control, and I stuck to it. Do what you can in your own little spot that you're in. Telephone people, send cards, and let people know you're thinking of them.” At 102, Ellson uses Zoom video calls with her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, and makes meals and desserts she leaves on her porch for nearby family. In February she cooked for 25 people.¹

“I'm not in control of the virus, but God is going to see us through,” she says. “It's all going to straighten out and life will go on.

Thinking that God is there with me helps me get through each day.”²

The long view based on a mother's faith.

Remember your times, right now and every day ahead, are in God's hands.

Have faith

Trust that God is with you

Have hope

Take it day by day

I pray that you will be able to visit today by phone or video call with your mother – or do something in her memory. Celebrate the blessings. We are going to make it through this together.

After all, our time is in God's hands. Amen.

¹ Jesse Dougherty, “Comfort from a 102-year-old who has lived through a flu pandemic, the Depression and WWII,” *the Washington Post*, April 5, 2020.

² Crystal Caviness, “Centenarian offers words of comfort during pandemic,” *UMNews*, April 14, 2020.