

Sermon: *Trusting God in COVID Times*
February 21, 2021
Psalm 25:1-10
Rev. Becky Nicol

Has your trust in God wavered during this almost year-long pandemic?
Have you wondered where God is?

Crises make us turn to God in prayer and scripture. In his book, *Virus as a Summons to Faith*, Walter Brueggemann says the Old Testament is known for helping people who lost their normal way of life to cope and look to the future.¹ Those stories remind us that this is not the first pandemic. Brueggemann also believes that "any serious crisis is a call to reread the Bible afresh."²

Biblical scholar N.T. Wright says we can't explain what happened and why, but we can lament - and that the point of lament is "not just to vent our frustration, sadness, loneliness and inability to understand what is happening or why. The mystery of the biblical story is that God also laments."³

The Psalms are full of cries to God for help, laments about difficulties, and statements of trust in God. Our reading today, from Psalm 25 is a lament and a psalm of trust.⁴ The psalmist is experiencing difficult times and seeks God's help through teaching and guidance. Psalm 25 is a model prayer showing us how to turn to God in tough times.

It is also one of several acrostic poems in the psalter.⁵ The 22 lines of the entire psalm each begin with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet - in order - helping believers memorize the poem, remember it, and pray it. After all, the alphabet is foundation of our education - one of first things we learn.

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Virus as a Summons to Faith: Biblical Reflections in a Time of Loss, Grief, and Uncertainty*, Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2020, foreword.

² Ibid., preface.

³ N.T. Wright, "Christianity Offers No Answers About the Coronavirus. It's Not Supposed To," TIME, March 29, 2020.

⁴ C Hassell bullock, Mark Strauss, and John Walton, eds., *Teach the Text, vol. 1 Psalms*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015, loc. 5135.

⁵ Joel LeMon, Commentary on Psalm 25:1-10, *Working Preacher*, July 14, 2019.

Associate Professor of Old Testament, at Candler School of Theology, Joel LeMon, says Israel connected "the structure of their alphabet with the structure God provides by instruction... that God provides order and meaning for our lives."⁶

Sometimes acrostics have a hidden message, too. The Hebrew letters of the first, middle and last lines spell out the Hebrew word which means learn.⁷ We get the message in several ways!

Verse 1 says, "*we lift up our soul to God.*" In ancient Israel - and today - lifting ones hands up is a way of prayer, of opening ourselves to receive God's mercy and grace. It is followed by - "O my God, in you I trust." Many psalms reaffirm our trust in God: Psalm 37 says, "Trust in the Lord and do good," Psalm 119 says, "for I trust in your word," and Psalm 56:3-4 says, "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust." There are many others that speak of trust.

In verse 4 we get the main message of this first half of the psalm, "make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths." The words show, teach, guide, instruct, remember - all occur two or more times in the psalm, emphasizing what we should do - ask God to teach us and learn God's way to live.

Verse 5 concludes with, "I wait all day long." Here, the word translated as wait means both to wait and to hope...not just waiting but waiting and hoping for God's good promises.⁸ Right now we're doing lots of waiting and hoping - and learning. A Pew Center study last year found that 86% of those surveyed think there are lessons to be learned from the pandemic.⁹

- practical lessons - like the importance of wearing masks and washing our hands,
- personal lessons - the importance of spending time with family and loved ones,
- societal lessons - the need for health care and social and economic justice.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Stephen L. Cook, *Feasting on the Word, Year B: Lent through Eastertide*, loc. 1309.

⁸ Rolf Jacobson, Psalm 25:1-10 commentary, *Working Preacher*, November 29, 2015.

⁹ John Gramlich, "20 Striking Findings from 2020," *Factank* - Pew research center, December 11, 2020.

- and global lessons - about how quickly our habits affect our environment.¹⁰

We've learned what is really important and the need to work in unity. And, and we've also seen God at work through the many people who are caring for others in new ways.

Many of us have also learned how easy it is to lose our normal routines! Has this happened to you? Even though we know it helps our resilience to have some structure in our days. Charles Aaron, Junior, of Perkins School of Theology, says that wisdom tradition tells us "that one of the ways God intervenes in our lives during times of distress is through our own discipline and moral development."¹¹

Let me say that again - one of the ways God intervenes in our lives during times of distress is through our own discipline and moral development.

Lent is a time for disciplines and spiritual development - a time to turn back to God and re-focus our lives and habits in line with God's ways. Two of the most important disciplines are prayer and study of scripture.

So, I invite you to practice the discipline of learning, by joining in as we read the Gospels during Lent. The daily reading list is on our website. It started on Ash Wednesday, but you can still start - give it a try! I'd suggest two things to help you:

1) **set aside a time each day** - Monday thru Saturday, for prayer and reading each day's scripture lesson. We need to keep learning to make progress along God's paths.

2) take a moment before reading to **offer a brief prayer** - asking God to help you better understand what you are going to read.

¹⁰ "What Lessons Do Americans See for Humanity in the Pandemic?" Pew Research Center: Religion & Public Life, October 8, 2020.

¹¹ David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, editors, *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008, loc 1232.

And be sure to join in our weekly worship - another way to practice learning from scripture.

Will you set aside time every day so you can spend these next week's deepening your faith and trust in God by reading God's Word? Our road map is ***Reading the Gospels during Lent.***

I hope you'll come along - and keep learning - with us.

Amen.