

## Great is Thy Faithfulness

June 6, 2021

UMC Geneva

“He’s got the whole world in his hands...” That about sums up the thrust of Psalm 138. Psalm 138 is so timely! Why? Because it reminds us of who’s ultimately in charge around here. Not me! Not you! Not our government! Not Covid!

Biblical scholars categorize the Psalms according to a variety of types. And while Psalm 138 is labeled a song of praise, it is unique in several ways. For starters it has the characteristics of both an individual and a communal song of praise. They tended to be either/or – individual or corporate. Second, it’s unique due to its ambiguity. It reflects a time of transition. One of those dangerous, oft-times confusing “betwixt-and-between” times of life individually and corporately. Social scientists call such transitional times “liminal time.” Hebrew Bible scholar \*J. Clinton McCann Jr. explains it this way. He says that “the uniqueness of Psalm 138 is its fundamental ambiguity. It seems that the psalmist has already been delivered (v.3), yet continues to pray for deliverance.” In other words, deliverance has already come, but it’s not yet complete!

How *à propos* to our situation today as we find ourselves individually, and as a community and nation, emerging from the crisis of a century – the Covid pandemic. It’s that “already/not yet” feeling. While we seem to have been delivered from Covid with new cases rapidly decreasing (the “already” aspect), we are not quite out of the woods yet, are we (the “not yet” aspect). We’re still in that liminal space, that dangerous, dis-orienting place of transition in which we simultaneously experience the “already” alongside of the “not yet.”

If you think about it, in a very real sense, we acknowledge liminality every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer. While we affirm “thine is the kingdom” we also pray “thy kingdom come.” God’s presence, rule and reign are both already here, yet remain to come in its fullness in the future.

Fact is, this time of year is full of transitions...full of liminal times. It’s graduation time! Whether from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, Sr. High, college or graduate school, graduation is a time of transition from one state of being to another, from one social status to another, not only for the individual graduating, but for his or her family as well. In the midst of great joy, graduates no doubt experience some fear

and trepidation as they ask themselves – hmm, I wonder what H.S. or college will be like? Will I fit in socially? Will I be able to succeed academically? Will I be picked on as a freshman? And so on.

For those graduating from college it can be both exhilarating and terrifying with lots of hope and lots of questions! Will I be able to find a job with my new degree? Will it be in my field of study? Or will I have to work in some field I really don't know or like? Will Mom and Dad let me stay at home with them – at least for a while? Or will I be on my own in the world?

The same is true in the life of the church. At the Conference level, pastors, their families and the churches they serve are in the midst of liminal time right now! Pastors and their families are packing up their belongings, saying tearful good-byes, leaving one church family and beginning the process of establishing relationships with a new church family. Moving from their existing parsonage or home into yet another one. Changing communities and schools and so forth.

Churches likewise move through a whole range of thoughts and feelings – from sorrow and sadness to hope and joy - and a whole lot of hard work preparing for the arrival of a new pastor. Along with pastors, church staff and church leaders such as Staff Parish Committee members and the Trustees shoulder much of the preparation, anticipation and anxiety of receiving a new pastor and his or her family. The Darr's and the Hamilton's and UMC Geneva are going through this even as I speak!

The composer of Psalm 138, the temple priests and temple personnel, indeed the whole nation of Israel knew well the betwixt-and-between nature and disorientation of liminal time. Where did they turn individually and corporately in such times? They turned to God! They turned to the Lord. Psalm 138 focuses on...honors and celebrates the steadfast love and faithfulness of God...of God's *hesed*.

So as we emerge from Covid. As we graduate. As we change pastors. As we continue to face chaotic times in our lives. May we, like the psalmist of old and the temple congregation, celebrate the name, the intimate care, the steadfast love, and faithfulness of God in the manifold circumstances we find ourselves in – whether they be places of safety and security, or our chaotic political, economic

and social worlds. In the midst of daily challenges and troubles, may we continue to turn to God, our God, who is worthy of our worship and gratitude. Let us turn to the Lord for strength and solace, courage and care. And may we ever sing “He’s got the whole world in his hands.” Great is thy faithfulness, indeed! **Amen.**

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\*J. Clinton McCann, Jr. “Commentary on the Psalms,” in *The New Interpreters Bible*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, p. 1231.