

## Faith or Fear

**Philippians 4:4-7**  
**July 2, 2023**

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**Pastor Dave Carlson**

Imagine what it's like for a middle-aged person to return to high school for a visit. She walks down the old, familiar hallways, sees the students and how young they all look, recalls the faces of her own fellow students; they seem to haunt those hallways.

But then the visitor sees a familiar face. It's one of her old teachers. That young guy right out of college, the one they all liked! Only now he's not so young. His hair has gone gray and he's nearing retirement.

The two of them eye each other for a moment, then he smiles with recognition. He speaks her name. That's all. And that's enough.

All she really needed right then was for one person – just one person – to say her name. Someone who remembered her.

It's not easy to feel all alone, lost in a sea of people. No one sees you, no one knows what you're going through, no one seems to care. Now think if you felt that way about God, that God doesn't care, doesn't see you.

Or if he does, he's not concerned with what you're going through, the struggles you face, the hopes you've given up on, the dreams that will never come true. That's how King David felt when he wrote the Psalm we heard read today.

The Psalms are notorious for not giving us specific circumstances or context. The New Interpreter's Bible commentary says, "The psalms consistently hold together ... three ... realms of experience that we ... are inclined to separate – the psychological, the sociological, and the theological."<sup>1</sup>

In other words, David is struggling emotionally and spiritually, society itself seems to be against him, and God doesn't seem to care. Have you ever been up against something in life and wondered if God even cared? What was that like for you?

Or maybe you're feeling that way right now about something. What do you do? If you complain to God, it feels less than faithful. If you doubt God and his involvement in the world, hopelessness sets in.

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<sup>1</sup> The New Interpreter's Bible, Psalms, J. Clinton McCann, Jr.

And yet, that's just what David does. David complains to God and doubts his commitment to this world, saying, "How Long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?"

David is saying that not only has God forgotten him, but God is actually and actively turning his back on him.

Can you imagine believing that God has forgotten you? Or worse yet, turned away from you? Left you to fend for yourself, sink or swim on your own?

This week, we celebrate the birth of our nation, and all the hopes and dreams and promises the United States was founded on: "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." "Government by the people and for the people." "One nation under God."

As you think of those promises and look at our country today, how do you think we're doing? "Life, liberty and happiness (for some, but not for all)." "Government by the (powerful) and for the (powerful)." "One nation, (but where is God)." Has God forgotten us?

No. As we see in David's experience, it's not God who has forgotten us, but it is we who have forgotten God. This is particularly true for those who feel that God has abandoned us, left us to our own devices.

This is how David feels when he cries out, saying, "How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?" David sees his enemies being exalted, when actually it is God who is to be exalted.

The "enemy" mentioned here is unnamed. And yet, in the Psalms the enemy is typically identified as the rich, the powerful, the proud, the arrogant, and the irreligious, those who see no need for God, have no appreciation for his many blessings.

How do we fight or at least withstand an enemy such as this? We can't. We can't win against those concerned only with their own wealth and power. There's no reasoning with those who are self-righteous and arrogant, those who have no commitment to something greater than themselves, no appreciation of God.

We can't win against such forces. But we can keep them from winning against us, with God's help, by never giving up, never letting fear overcome our faith.

In standing up against such fear and hopelessness, David turns to God. He says, "Consider and answer me, O Lord my God! Give light to my eyes...."

David knows God has not forgotten him or turned his back on him. Oh, he may complain about God, but the one he complains to is God. And God is OK with that, because David has not given up on God.

David is crying out in great faith, not fear. David has faith in God, even when he feels abandoned. David knows that what we see as obstacles to all God has promised, are really just moments in time that God is even now turning to his good purpose.

A mother and her adult daughter were saying goodbye at the airport. A man standing nearby overhears them. It's an odd farewell: "I love you and wish you enough," says the mother. "I wish you enough, too," the daughter replies.

After the daughter leaves, the man asks about this odd farewell. The mother says, "That's a wish that has been handed down from other generations. My parents used to say it to everyone."

Then she pauses a moment and looks up as if trying to remember. "When we say, 'I wish you enough,' we are wanting the other person to have a life filled with just enough good things to sustain them."

She then turned to the man and shared the following as if reciting it from memory:

I wish you enough sun to keep your attitude bright...

I wish you enough rain to appreciate the sun....

I wish you enough happiness to keep your spirit alive....

I wish you enough pain so that even the smallest of joys ... may appear bigger.

I wish you enough gain to satisfy your wanting, ... enough loss to appreciate all that you (have). I wish you enough hellos to get you through the final goodbye.

Sun and rain; happiness and pain; gain and loss; hellos and goodbyes.... God is with us through them all, and uses all our experiences, all life's circumstances to bring us closer to God and to one another, when we keep the faith and don't give in to the fear.

In his final cry to God, David declares, "I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me." David knows that God has blessed him – has dealt bountifully with him, as he says. David doesn't turn to God so that all his problems will be solved. No, he turns to God because of who he knows God to be – loving and faithful and all powerful.

No matter what you're up against, no matter what society is up against, God loves you more than all the hate in the world, God's plan and purpose is more certain than all the fear in the world, and God's power is greater than any power on earth.

So yes, cry out to God, and trust in God. As it says on the all mighty dollar – our national motto – “In God we trust.” Amen.

## **PASTORAL PRAYER**

### **Let us pray:**

God of liberty, we rejoice in the blessed abundance you have bestowed on our cherished land. We praise you for the freedom of religious expression which allows us to gather the way we have today.

We praise you for the freedom to say what we think. We praise you for the freedom to dream our own dreams and to strive to make them come true.

In freedom we are strong, yet freedom is a fragile thing. Thank you for the men and women who help to defend our country, and guide the decision makers by your divine wisdom and desire for peace and prosperity.

Help us protect our freedoms through the exercise of personal and civic responsibility. Give us as citizens the discernment to realize that poverty and violence anywhere weakens the nation everywhere.

Help the citizens of this land to achieve consensus on our most pressing issues, so that united we can help our elected leaders govern with clarity, consistency and decisiveness.

As people who have been freed forever through the blood of Jesus Christ, help us to guard against the tyranny of self-interest and greed.

Inspire us to be advocates for people whose voices cannot be heard in the public debate, that all your people may have a share in honor and freedom and hope.

We pray for those who are grieving the loss of a friend or loved one. We pray for those in need of your healing touch and the blessing of restored health and wellbeing.

We pray all this, O Lord, confident in your presence, your compassion, your care, and mindful of the prayer that you taught us, as we raise our eyes to heaven and our voices in song, praying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen**