

Welcome

Hi this is Pastor Melinda, Tancrede, and Sophia from Shiloh UCC. This is our midweek message. I hope everyone's well and healthy. This week let's meditate on the Psalm suggested by the Lectionary for Sunday.

Psalm 86

Supplication for Help against Enemies

A Prayer of David.

- 1 Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me,
for I am poor and needy.*
- 2 Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you;
save your servant who trusts in you.
You are my God;*
- 3 be gracious to me, O Lord,
for to you do I cry all day long.*
- 4 Gladden the soul of your servant,
for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.*
- 5 For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.*
- 6 Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer;
listen to my cry of supplication.*
- 7 In the day of my trouble I call on you,
for you will answer me.*
- 8 There is none like you among the gods, O Lord,
nor are there any works like yours.*
- 9 All the nations you have made shall come
and bow down before you, O Lord,
and shall glorify your name.*
- 10 For you are great and do wondrous things;
you alone are God.*
- 16 Turn to me and be gracious to me;
give your strength to your servant;
save the child of your serving girl.*
- 17 Show me a sign of your favor,
so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame,
because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.*

The first half of our Psalm is an individual lament. A lamentation, like the biblical book of the same name, cries out to God in pain, searching faithfully for comfort. The seeker knows that God is the answer, so he attempts to persuade God to come to his aid.

In our psalm help does come. A word of assurance brings praise onto the lips of the poet. Then in verses 14 through 17 the individual lament returns.¹ On a more down to earth approach, one of the commentaries says that the real title of this Psalm should be the “Prayer of the Lonely.”²

During this COVID crisis many people are feeling lonely. This loneliness is more than just not being around people. We are lonely for meaning and purpose. We are lonely for all the craziness in the world to make sense. But on a more basic level we are lonely for God.

Sometimes, all we can do is: pray. When your heart is lonely for God, no one else will do. St. Augustine says in his “Confessions” to God, “you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” Until our heart rests in God, no earthly riches or people will fill that lonely void.

The Coronavirus epidemic has a bad effect on many people. Some people won’t wear masks and others simply don’t believe that there is a problem. The grief is so intense that they deny reality. Others have been trying to “be good”, staying at home for months, especially older adults. The news says that there are more cases now than ever. This is confusing, since our leaders are telling us that it’s OK to go outside. Now, that York County is “in the green” I’m not even sure what we need to do. I go to some stores and no one is wearing a mask; in other stores everyone is required to wear one.

These times can be confusing for everyone, and many of us can feel isolated and lonely. What is the proper way for a Christian to behave in times like these? Conventional ethics seem to be breaking down, or at the very least no-one knows what the next step is, to avoid re-infection.

When I talk to people over the phone or the Internet, every single one of them tells me how much they miss “in person” worship services. Now, that we

1 http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2082; *Commentary on Psalm 86:11-17* by Walter C. Bouzard 2014.

2 <http://www.word-sunday.com/Files/Psalms/86.html>; *Prayer of the Lonely* by Larry Broding (Copyright 1999-2017).

will soon meet in person at Shiloh UCC, no one really knows exactly how to proceed and how to best protect the most vulnerable.

So we have had several meetings with the Consistory trying to find the best way to keep everyone safe and at the same time enjoy worship services.

Some people get upset because we are asking people to wear masks to the services. Others think we should just meet outside because it's too dangerous to be in the building together. It's impossible to please everyone. We want to make everyone happy, but we also want to keep you safe.

So if you feel lonely and isolated, and miss being in our beautiful Sanctuary, you are not alone. We all miss each other. We all love each other. We love church! When you hear our plans of how we will reopen for in person services, remember, the Consistory and I are doing everything for the benefit of our whole congregation.

Until then, we are lifting up each other in prayer for immunity, health and safety. Until then, I encourage you to spend time with God in silence and prayer, so your soul stays fed and your heart comforted. In God you will find everything you need for this hour and every moment of your life. God is with you right now, and God will be with us when we reopen. So do not be afraid. Trust the God who is guiding us out of this pandemic.

Let's be angels who comfort each other. We must remember the people who are experiencing grief in our congregation. Many were struggling even before this outbreak. They feel even more isolated and lonely. Some have lost family members, some have lost jobs, some have missed a special event, like a graduation, because of the Coronavirus. Some people are going through health problems or depression. Let us remember them in our prayers.

Let us pray not simply for ourselves, but also for one another. Through prayer and our love of God we are constantly connected. Just like you cannot see God, but you still know that God loves you and God is with you; you cannot see your friends at Shiloh UCC, but they still love you and miss you. You are part of a spiritual community who hasn't forgotten about you. We are one in the body of Christ.

Sometimes, we just have to give our worries and problems into God's hands. When your cross feels too heavy to carry alone, share it with others.

When your problems or sadness overwhelm you, call up your pastor and talk to me. Reach out to your friends and let them know you need them.

But most of all, reach out to God. The words in the Book of Psalms helped me through many difficult times. When I didn't know what to pray for or how to pray, I read a Psalm and I found peace in God. No matter what you are going through right now, loneliness, grief, illness, or worries, in God you find everything your need.

And after the dark days are over, and we return to an "almost normal" life, we all must remember to praise God who helped us through all difficulties. When things are good and we are happy, it's easy to forget to thank God. The Psalms remind us that we must praise and glorify God's name after the hard times are over. Listen to the words of Psalm 86 and praise God in your heart with thanksgiving.

*"7 In the day of my trouble I call on you,
for you will answer me.*

*8 There is none like you among the gods, O Lord,
nor are there any works like yours.*

*9 All the nations you have made shall come
and bow down before you, O Lord,
and shall glorify your name.*

*10 For you are great and do wondrous things;
you alone are God." AMEN.*

Hymn "Morning Has Broken"

Benediction

Thursday morning at 10:00 AM I will have "open office hours" at the main entrance. Let's have another drive-through event at Shiloh UCC. Come, wave and say "hello" to your Pastor if you are in the area and come check out our new roof. Stay well and healthy. Bye-bye.