

Faithful One

Psalm 37

Good Morning Church Family,

It's good to be here this morning on this last Sunday in June. I hope everyone here and those watching online gets some much needed rest and refreshment during these summer months.

As you know, we will not be meeting for our regular worship gathering during July and August, and including the September long weekend. Services will resume here again on September 11th. Everyone, including those of you who join us online are welcome to join in for the backyard coffee times, so watch for those emails.

Anyway, that's a bit of housekeeping. Last week, when I was preparing my message for this morning, I was a bit stumped about what to preach on. I knew it would be my last sermon before we take our summer break, and so, I asked Taylor, "Hypothetically speaking, if you were a pastor and you were going to preach one more sermon before you went on a break for eight weeks, what would you preach on? Hypothetically." Taylor responded, "I'd have to think about it." Junia, however, piped up. "I have an idea! I think you should preach about God's love. Or how God protects us." "Those are great ideas, Junie, thank you!" "Maybe I'll be a preacher someday, she replied, "But I'd rather be a zoo keeper."

It was this short conversation with Junia that inspired my message for this morning. Before the summer, I'd like to use this time to remember who God is in this world, to us and for us. At our church back in Manitoba, on occasion the sermon for the morning would just be a book of the Bible being read by someone in the congregation. Usually, it was one of the short epistles, the letters, and there would always be a short discussion time afterward. It was really amazing to hear what stood out to people when a longer passage of scripture was read, without the hermeneutic unpacking that a speaker would usually do. That exercise reminded me that God speaks through scripture, of God's own accord. And each person may hear something very different and lots okay, the voice of God through scripture is not homogenous.

So, for this morning, I'm going to take a bit of a hybrid approach. I'm going to be reading portions of Psalm 36, doing a bit of commentary, and then reading that same portion again. Each time, I'll be reading from a different translation or paraphrase of the Bible. Because hearing scripture in a different version can make a scripture seem fresh and newly accessible. I chose Psalm 36 for this morning because it's an honest take, a personal, emotional response on the faithfulness of God and the reality of the world we live in.

A couple of weeks ago, Char told me that "it's hard to daydream during your sermons." Haha, which I took as quite a compliment! However, for the scripture reading portions of my message, I'd invite you to daydream a little, close your eyes perhaps, listen to the

words and see what thoughts come to you. My commentary between readings is intended as a springboard, but certainly not the only way to hear or interpret this passage. In my preaching course this fall, Meghan Good, who taught the course encouraged us to think of a scripture passage as diamond, which reflects light in many ways. It's up to the preacher, or in the case of us this morning, the listener to choose which light ray to amplify. Let's dive in.

Psalm 36: 1-4 (NRSV)

Transgression speaks to the wicked

deep in their hearts;

there is no fear of God

before their eyes.

For they flatter themselves in their own eyes

that their iniquity cannot be found out and hated.

The words of their mouths are mischief and deceit;

they have ceased to act wisely and do good.

They plot mischief while on their beds;

they are set on a way that is not good;

they do not reject evil.

One of things about Christianity that deeply resonates with me is that it's honest about the human condition, honest about the reality we live in. One need only to look around,

to open a news website, to listen to the things shared on Sunday mornings or at coffee row to realize that we are not okay, this is not how things ought to be, we are not okay.

Taylor and I were having a discussion this week about eschatology, that topic of “last things,” or “end times in the bible”. During the 19th century, in western Christianity, there was this idea that the world was, finally, getting better and better. The industrial revolution was happening, the standard of living in the west was rising, science was advancing and solving problems, the social gospel movement was growing. “We’re getting better! Things are finally getting better, humanity is going to arrive.” And then World War One happened. The death, disease and destruction of the war shook the global confidence that we could fix things, that we could rise above the human condition. This notion that we’ll overcome all that is wrong with the world on our own steam has always been around.

And the Psalmist acknowledges that. He sees wickedness, foolishness and outright evil in his reality and he tells God this. “Look at what’s happening! Nothing good! I can see this with my own eyes, surely you can too.” The honesty in the Psalms invites us into the same honesty in our lives as we look around us. Rachel Held Evans once wrote, “I’m a Christian because Christianity names and addresses sin. It acknowledges the reality that the evil we observe in the world is also present within ourselves. It tells the truth about the human condition - that we’re not okay.”

Psalm 36:1-4 (NLT)

Sin whispers to the wicked, deep within their hearts.

They have no fear of God at all.

In their blind conceit,

they cannot see how wicked they really are.

Everything they say is crooked and deceitful.

They refuse to act wisely or do good.

They lie awake at night, hatching sinful plots.

Their actions are never good.

They make no attempt to turn from evil.

All is not right, and yet, God is still faithful. God is still at work.

Psalm 36:5-9 (NIV)

Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens,

your faithfulness to the skies.

Your righteousness is like the highest mountains,

your justice like the great deep.

You, Lord, preserve both people and animals.

How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!

People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

They feast on the abundance of your house;

you give them drink from your river of delights.

For with you is the fountain of life;

in your light we see light.

Just as the scriptures are honest all is wrong, the scriptures are honest about who we can put our trust and our hope in. The Psalmist shifts from discussing the people that he sees working evil in the world to the character and nature of God. Our God is faithful, righteous and just. Our God preserves us, both people and animals. God's love is unfailing. We find protection in you, where God dwells is a place of abundance, God is life and light.

The pandemic, and some of the more recent tragedies in the world, the war in Ukraine, the mass shootings in the US, have brought me to tears over how terrible people can be and also how good and beautiful people can be. Like the images from several months

ago, of Ukrainian Refugees arriving in Berlin, Germany. Crowds of traumatized, exhausted Ukrainians forced to flee by the cruel actions of Russia, and they are met at the stations by people, holding handmade signs, written in Ukrainian, "Room and bed for one person." "I can take a family of four!" "Children welcome."

God is at work in the world, that's the only explanation that I can find of where I can anchor myself in life. In the one who is so faithful, in the one who brings goodness and hope into our reality and into the lives of the people who choose to follow in God's ways.

Throughout the Bible, we find stories of people who leaned into the faithful promises of God, no matter where life took them. Romans 4 recounts the story of Abraham, who followed God's call into unknown places, and who kept leaning into the faithful promises of God, despite all evidence to the contrary. Romans 4:17b-18a says, "This happened because Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who creates new things out of nothing. Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping—believing that he would become the father of many nations." Just like Abraham, we follow the God who creates new things out of nothing. The New International Version's translation of this verse says that God, "calls into being things that were not." Our hope is not found in the world around us, but rather in the God who is in the business of Resurrection.

Psalm 36:5-9 (the message)

God's love is meteoric,

his loyalty astronomic,

His purpose titanic,

his verdicts oceanic.

Yet in his largeness

nothing gets lost;

Not a man, not a mouse,

slips through the cracks.

How exquisite your love, O God!

How eager we are to run under your wings,

To eat our fill at the banquet you spread

as you fill our tankards with Eden spring water.

You're a fountain of cascading light,

and you open our eyes to light.

God is faithful. Not only is God faithful, God Wins.

Psalm 36: 10-12 (NASB)

Prolong Your mercy to those who know You,

And Your righteousness to the upright of heart.

May the foot of pride not come upon me,

And may the hand of the wicked not drive me away.

Those who do injustice have fallen there;

They have been thrust down and cannot rise.

We see the Psalmist wrestling with these two competing realities that he sees at work in the world. Evil is present and causing trouble. God is faithful and forever. Both are true at the same time, but the clincher, it would seem for the Psalmist is, ultimately, God's purposes will be fulfilled, God's mercy will extend forever.

When I was in high school and in college, the question of the End Times, and what would happen before, during and after Christ's return. To know exactly how it would go

seemed imperative to many people, myself included (at certain points). These questions came up in my new testament course in college, and my professor very kindly responded to the many specific questions about the book of Revelations to say, "The point of Revelations is that God wins. That's what we know for certain." That's always stuck with me. God Wins. The Psalmist who wrote these words, who prayed this prayer, knew how the story ended, and so he could lament about the state of the world AND rejoice in God's faithfulness. That's the place where I'm trying to live in summer, a place of both honesty and hope. A place where I can be honest about the brokenness and the beauty because God wins. As Jesus said to his disciples in John 16:33, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

"Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who know you,

and your righteousness to the upright of heart!

Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me,

nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.

There the evildoers lie fallen;

they are thrust down, unable to rise."

Friends, let us walk in the steadfast love of God and God's ways into our summer

together.

Amen.