

SERMON  
First Lutheran Church  
Aitkin, Minnesota

Psalm 13  
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen  
June 18, 2017

### **KIDS' MESSAGE**

This week, kids, I saved a toad. It was stuck in a small tub of water. My wife used the tub to make a small pool for water to run into from an old pump. The top of the tub is even with the ground, so this toad probably hopped in without realizing it was there. The tub has kind of high, straight sides, so the toad couldn't get back out again. He was trying to get out, but he looked worn out. I could tell he would end up dying in the tub if I didn't help him to escape. So, I took a shovel and slowly lifted him out of the water and slipped him off onto the ground beside the tub. He was so tired that he just sat there looking at me. When I came by a few minutes later, he was gone. I'm pretty sure that I saved his life.

Have you ever helped a frog? Fed some birds? Cared for a pet dog, cat, or hamster? You probably helped keep them alive.

Have you ever needed help yourself? Lost? Afraid? Very sick? Did someone help you? Could it have been God who helped you through that person?

Have you ever helped someone else who was in trouble, sad, sick, afraid, lonely? Do you think it maybe could have been God who helped them through you?

On the news last night, I heard about two young boys who had dug a tunnel in a snow bank. They were inside when the snowplow came along and covered the entrance to their snow cave. They were trapped inside, wet and freezing cold for several hours. Finally some policemen and their canine companion/dog found where the boys were and dug them out. They saved the boys lives. Do you think maybe God was helping with that too?

When we are in trouble, God always moves to try to help us. And lots of the time, God does it through the people who are already around us. And sometimes God moves through you too. Thanks be to God. And thanks for helping God. Amen.

## **ADULT MESSAGE**

You've heard me say it many times before. Whenever I am preaching, I have it figured that about every third person in the congregation has some sort of a major struggle going on in their life. It's just a matter of whose turn it is this week and **what are you going to do about it**. No one is immune. In our **Psalm 13** text for today, someone is **crying out for God's help**. One third of the 150 Psalms are examples of people petitioning God for help. God's answer doesn't always come speedily. Our psalmist, four times, says,

- **"How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?"**
- **"How long will you hide your face from me?"**
- **"How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long?"**
- **"How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?"**

I don't know what the psalmist is dealing with, but he's at wit's end and his patience with God has disappeared. He seems to be angry and yelling at God. Yet God does not strike him down. His angry words have entered into the ancient scriptures. The Psalms were literally ancient Israel's hymnal/song book. Could it be that God welcomes and readily receives our human challenges, doubts and fears? Have you ever been angry with God? Have you ever wondered why God hasn't moved to make things better in your life or this world? Have you yelled at God, at least in your heart?

**God has had to be very patient with me over the years.** I haven't yelled at God. But I have often questioned why there are so many terrible things happening in God's world. And I do tend to get side-tracked from my specific prayers to God and end up thinking about a host of different topics. Then eventually, I realize that I have wandered and turn my focus back to my conversation with God. And sometimes I pray in the shower, or when driving, or sitting on the toilet, or in my deer stand. Does God hear all those prayers? And sometimes I fall asleep at night without remembering to pray. And sometimes I wake in the middle of the night, worried about something and finally remember to ask God to help me to go back to sleep and see what God and I can do about the problem in the morning. And sometimes I get to thinking that there is no God at all. . .

Our **world is reeling** with wars, terrorist attacks, shootings by people who have gone over the edge, opioid addictions, natural disasters, apartment fires. . . Our **lives are reeling** with job losses, chronic illness, the disability of our spouses, the need to move to housing that is more suitable, financial problems, kids in trouble.

What happened with the psalmist? His **situation** was - There is "**pain in my soul**" and "**sorrow in my heart**." He was struggling in dark and heavy days. His **history** was - "**But I trusted in your steadfast love**." He had experienced God's love and care in the past. His **future hope** was - "**My heart shall rejoice in your salvation**." Salvation means "**wholeness or healing**." This person, starting out with **anger and impatience**, finally returns to **trust and hope**. God will somehow make things work out the best they can. He can say this because he has experienced God's love, help and hope in his past. And **then** the psalm writer makes a **promise** - "**I will sing to the Lord**, because **he has dealt bountifully with me**." Once we have been rescued, delivered from our trouble, it is time for us to say, "**Thank you**" to God.

We often can't see God in the midst of our darkest realities, but faith assures us that God is there no matter what. One of my earliest parishioners gave me this little "**Twenty-Four Hours a Day**" book after he successfully completed treatment for alcoholism. It was his **fifth try**. This time he made it to sobriety and was set free to live his last years in God's peace, fully enjoying each new day. This past week, on **June 10**, the day of **Bill Galliger's funeral**, knowing that Bill was a recovering alcoholic, I looked at the "**Meditation for the Day**." This is what it says:

**The world wonders when it sees a person who can unexpectedly draw large and unsuspected sums from the bank for some emergency. But what the world has not seen are the countless small sums paid into that bank, earned by faithful work over a long time. And so is the bank of the spirit. The world sees the person of faith make a demand on God's stores of power and the demand is met. The world does not see what that person has been putting in, in thanks and praise, in prayer and communion, in small good deeds done faithfully, steadily over the years.**"

The June 10 "**Prayer for the Day**" reads:

**“I pray that I may keep making deposits in God’s bank. I pray that in my hour of need, I may call upon these.”**

Today, you are making deposits in the **bank of your faith**. God gives us faith, but faith left unattended, may in times of need be hard to find and hard to cling to. If we haven’t talked to God for years, our expectations for God’s help could well be very low. Bill’s favorite prayer was **“The Serenity Prayer.”** You probably know it. **“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”** The writer of Psalm 13, was **angry and doubted God, but kept on bothering God** for an answer to his problems. God answered then and since.

**There are many historic examples of unbelievable terrible brought to good:**

- **In 1862**, our nation was ripped apart and tens of thousands died fighting over the issue of African American slavery. In 2008, we elected our first African American president.
- **During WW II**, Japan and Germany were our most vicious enemies and today they are among our best allies. We helped rebuild both nations.
- **During the era of Apartheid in South Africa**, the Dutch heritage-ruling minority beat, arrested and killed the African native population when they protested for freedom. A few years later, when the native people came to power, instead of arresting and killing the white leaders, they forgave them.
- **Bill Galliger**, whose funeral was here, last week, had lost everything as a young man – family, possessions – due to alcoholism. Then he went in for treatment and soon met **Kathy Meyer**. They married and went on to share 45 years of sobriety and a good and faithful marriage.
- **My mom battled Alzheimer’s disease** for nine years. On the day she died, I leaned over the bed of a woman who was by then only able to get out one or two words that made any sense. I told her that Jesus was coming to carry her home to heaven and that Dad and Grandma and Grandpa Ostman were waiting to welcome her there. I told her that God had a special place saved for her at God’s banqueting table. Then she spoke her last words, **“So beautiful.”** For years, Mom wasn’t always able to recognize me or other family members. But, on her last day, Mom was able to recognize God’s kingdom of heaven.

- **Our first child, Leah**, had seizures on the third day of her life. We were told she might die. She has since earned her Master's degree in International Relations and has traveled all over the world. Two weeks ago, we celebrated the wedding of our 40-year-old daughter. She and her French husband met while both teaching kiting at **Waves, N. C.**
- **My wife, Jennifer and I**, have had knockdown, drag-out battles in our marriage. But when trouble has come, both of us have turned to God in prayer for help. In August, we will celebrate our 44<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and may love each other more now than ever before.

I can't tell you the number of times, over the years, that I have had people pouring their hearts out to me over losses, disasters or set-backs. Their bottom has fallen out. Things looked hopeless, but many of them have come back and told me a year or so later, "**I never realized what an opportunity this problem might turn out to be. I never imagined that my life might recover, and even be so much better after I was forced to rethink where I was headed and what my priorities were.**" With God's help, **disaster** can even become **opportunity** for new life.

Since the time of our psalmist, **countless prayers have gone up to God** over each of these situations, over all of these years. Whether it be world conflicts, national struggles, local issues or our own personal lives – things are never all roses, every day better and better. Rather, in a hurting and broken world, **God faithfully, lovingly, compassionately walks with us today, tomorrow, the next day, and as long as it takes, as long as life lasts, and forever.** God is always moving to bring about the best good in our world and in our lives. And someday, there will be no more Alzheimer's, chemical dependency, prejudice, hatred, violence. . . **To believe that, you need faith.** The chief work of the Holy Spirit is to plant faith in our hearts and lives. The day you were **baptized**, the Holy Spirit moved into your life and has been planting faith there ever since. God is busy planting, nurturing and growing faith right here today, in your life and mine. May we be able **to hang onto faith** when trouble comes. And **whether we are able to believe or not, God will be hanging onto us. Today faith grows.** Thanks be to God. Amen.