

October 11, 2020

Psalm 46:1-11

"I Need A New Star Word"

Rev. Lou Nyiri

Title Slide

The text I'll focus on this morning is Psalm 46...lean in & listen attentively...

Scripture Slides – Psalm 46:1-11

Title Slide

Let us Pray:

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.

Come as the fire and burn,

Come as the wind and cleanse,

Come as the light and reveal,

Convict us, Convert us, Consecrate us...until we are wholly thine.

And now, Lord, my prayer is simply this:

That the words of my mouth

And the words of all our hearts will be found pleasing and acceptable to you,

for you are our rock and our redeemer...Amen.

Slide – Star Words

I recently was thinking about our annual Star Word Sunday selection.

A quick recap, in January on Epiphany Sunday we have a tradition of looking at the Magi & the new year – we recall the Magi's story and how they followed a star to God's incarnate – in the flesh love – Jesus the Christ – we recall the Magi's dream warning them to go home by another road for the procurer of their quest to find this babe wrapped in swaddling cloth had ill intent for the child.

We recall the words from W.H. Auden's Christmas Oratorio when he writes of three modern day wise-persons, "...to discover how to be human now is the reason we follow this star..." & "...[this star brings us to a place where] knowledge but increases vertigo..."

Then we pass around baskets filled with star cards for us to draw out a word without peeking – and then we are charged to take this word into the new year and consider the word to be a gift – a gift to be unwrapped as the year unfolds – to wonder how the word's meaning, impact or import changes as we encounter the year.

This event took place in January of this year...fast forward to the events of March where we find ourselves speaking words like coronavirus & pandemic...fast forward to September when

almost nine months after Epiphany I began thinking those Star Words we chose here in this sanctuary...and I thought aloud, "I need a new star word."

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I'm not going to tell you what my Star Word was – I am going to tell you what I realized as I've pulled at the thought thread which began with the notion that "I need a new star word" – I discovered that I added some new words into my faith lexicon which speak to me nowadays...

They are words that have been filling my soul, augmenting my faith and recalling for me the crux of Psalm 46:

Though earth should change / mountains shake and tremble / seas roar & foam:
God is refuge and strength...
A very present help in trouble.
The LORD of hosts is with us...
Be still and know that [God] is God...

A few of the words I have been leaning into of late...words which have provided a tethering for my soul amid life's chaos.

Peace...
& Hope...
Grace...
& Breath...

Comedian Jerry Seinfeld describes life, like this,

Seinfeld Slide

"Life is truly a ride. We're all strapped in and no one can stop it. As you make each passage from youth to adulthood to maturity, sometimes you put your arms up and scream, sometimes you just hang onto the bar in front of you. But the ride is the thing. I think the most you can hope for at the end [of the ride] is that your hair's messed up, you're out of breath and you [kept your lunch down]!"

I find, that right now, on this section of life's ride, I need to know:

Peace...
& Hope...
Grace...
& Breath...

Author Anne Lamott describes it, like this,

Lamott Slide

"Most of the time, I simply have to remember to breath, and have a sip of cool water. Spirit is breath and breezes. In the Christian tradition, it's also expressed as living water, poured over us, poured into us, into our dark, thirsty lives, and sometimes it streams down our faces in tears. It cleanses us, hydrates the ground at our feet, grows things, buoys us up and cools us

down. Unfortunately, I do not actually like to think about breathing – it leaves me gasping like a fish on the dock – and I don't like water at all. I personally would have preferred the Spirit to be experienced as lemonade..."¹

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Lamott goes on to talk about how when we are "empty" "breathless" we are filled by the Spirit's inspiring others to reach out to us not so much because they reach out to us – rather because what fills us is the very Spirit which animated their kindness.

I have found of late, that Peace...
 & Hope...
 Grace...
 & Breath...

often intercede into my life with sighs too deep for words when I have someone with whom I can talk aloud, or who will sit in the silence with me.

This is why you will soon be hearing about a caring connection ministry we hope to create for at minimum the winter season within our GPC family – the design is to create connection pods who will be companions for one another – folks who will call, write to, pray for, check-in on each other with regularity – that this same Spirit of God which blew through the dis-order & chaos to bring form at creation – will breathe life into us.

Across from the desk at my home office is a picture of Robert Zünd's 1877 painting "The Way to Emmaus"

Zund Painting Slide

it depicts the story from Luke's gospel about the Emmaus bound disciples who were walking and talking about Jesus' death & resurrection – trying to make sense of their days' events - Jesus joins them along the way and while their "...eyes were kept from recognizing..." Jesus – Jesus still walked & talked with them – those two disciples described their encounter like so, "...were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road..."

Zünd's painting is my reminder that I am [we are] not alone on this journey – we too have a companion along the way as we seek to make sense of unsettling times.

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We have refuge.

Our refuge, the Psalmist says, is God.

Refuge is vantage point.

¹ —Anne Lamott, "Every sandwich," *Salon*, February 14, 2003. salon.com. Retrieved February 1, 2017.

Refuge is foundation.
Refuge is about God's care and protection.

One final thought, then I'll sit down.

Discussing the movie *Castaway*, in which Tom Hanks plays a FedEx worker tossed up onto a deserted island for 1,500 days, the Rev. Robert Oliphant at Eglinton St. George's United Church in Toronto noted:

"While food, water, shelter and fire are essential to Chuck's survival on the island, his desperation only begins to be transformed when he strikes up a rather unusual friendship with "Wilson",

Castaway Movie Slide

a volleyball that is part of the wreckage from the doomed flight. Wilson initially is a wonderful excuse for the character to be able to talk out loud, a filmmaker's device to let the audience know at least a little of what Chuck is thinking. But then it becomes much more. Wilson seems to offer him strength, guidance, support and hope. Wilson seems to sustain him through his most difficult times."

Oliphant continues, "Several comments that I read about this film indicated that the writers felt it to be a godless film. Not at all. In fact, I always find it interesting that self-avowed atheist filmmakers such as Zemeckis often create some of the most powerfully spiritual films. Perhaps it is because they are less interested in giving answers about religious subjects than they are in elevating spiritual questions, spiritual longings, spiritual dilemmas. Chuck is like the psalmist who cries out, 'How long? How long?' Wilson, for Chuck, becomes a god similar to *the God* of which the psalm writer speaks: the rock of his strength and his place of refuge."

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Oliphant concludes, "Wilson isn't the accidental creation of the movie's hero, but rather one that comes along mysteriously, naturally and without struggle. Wilson is there before Chuck thinks of him. Wilson is there before Chuck calls upon him. Wilson is just there. Wilson is like [~~the best of~~] friends, coming into our lives naturally, without any forcing. Wilson is like [~~the best of gods~~] {God}, coming into our lives as we seek to move beyond survival toward fullness of life."²

God is a refuge who protects – not by hiding us...nor by hiding from us – rather by adequately equipping us to face that which cannot be avoided...whether it be:
a disease like cancer,
the dis-ease of dis-concerting times,
a sense of meaninglessness and loneliness that creeps in under our defenses,

² (Robert Oliphant, sermon at Eglinton St. George's United Church in Toronto, Esgunited.org. Retrieved August 15, 2002.)

that emptiness created by the death of a loved one,
or anything else we may encounter.

Refuge is remembering God is our strength and renewal.

Therein lies our	Peace...
“	our Hope...
“	our Grace...
“	our Breath...

Therein lies our faith.

Amen & Amen.