

3rd Sunday after Epiphany Yr B, 24/01/2021

Ps 62:5-12

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“Soulful silence and God our rock, fortress, and refuge”

Psalm 62 is identified in my NRSV *Lutheran Study Bible* (p. 850) as an instructional or wisdom psalm. Instructional/wisdom psalms often compare and contrast righteousness and unrighteousness, wisdom and foolishness, the ways of the world and God’s ways. In our psalm, verses 9 and 10 indeed sound much the same as some sayings in the Book of Proverbs. However, Psalm 62 is also a psalm that expresses trust and confidence in God.

The NRSV *Lutheran Study Bible* gives this psalm two titles: “To the leader: according to Jeduthun. A Psalm of David,” and “Song of Trust in God Alone.” The Jerusalem Bible also has two titles: “Hope in God alone,” and “For the choirmaster...Jeduthun Psalm Of David.” The Good News Bible has this title: “Confidence in God’s Protection.” Hebrew Bible scholars have observed that repeatedly the emphatic particle *’ak*, meaning “only,” or “alone,” appears to highlight the theme of trust and confidence in God, which may be understood as obedience to the first commandment—no other gods, but God.

The name Jeduthun is an interesting one, there are several references in the Hebrew Bible. He was a member of a levitical family according to 1 Chron 9:16; they were a family of gatekeepers in Jerusalem, and he is mentioned as a musician in 1 Chron 16:37-42; in 1 Chron 25:1, 3 and 6, Jeduthun and his family are temple musicians who prophesied God’s word; in 2 Chron 29:12-15, the sons of Jeduthun were among the Levites who, under the direction of King Hezekiah, cleansed the LORD’s temple; and in 2 Chron 35:15, Jeduthun is associated with the reforms of King Josiah and referred to as “the king’s seer,” thus in addition to being a levitical musician he also served as a prophet. Jeduthun is also named in the titles of two other psalms—Psalms 39 and 77.

Although the first four verses of Psalm 62 are not part of today’s lectionary; if you look at the first part of verse 1 and compare it with the beginning of verse 5, you’ll discover that the words are identical. Furthermore, if you look at verses 2 and 6,

you'll discover that they are almost identical too. Most likely this repetition of these verses functioned among God's people as part of a responsive liturgy—perhaps similar to the Kyrie of our liturgy, where we repeat the response “Lord, have mercy.”

In any case, verses 5 and 6, along with verse 7 focus on two important themes in Psalm 62, which I invite you to focus on with me now, the two themes are: soulful silence and the image of God as our rock, fortress and refuge. Elsewhere in the Book of Psalms the combination of rock, fortress and refuge as images of God are emphasised. One example is Psalm 18.

The psalmist speaking with trust and confidence says: “For God alone my soul waits in silence.” How many of us are comfortable with silence? Ours is a world full of noise. In fact we even speak of noise pollution. My *New Webster's Dictionary* (p. 681) defines noise pollution as: 1. excessive noise in the environment, typically from planes, autos, industry 2. addition of sound to the environment beyond the natural sources; measured in intensity, duration, frequency, and frequency of occurrence. When I think of these definitions of noise, what comes to my mind first is loud rock-n-roll music. I don't know about you, but it's a wonder that I can still hear, given how much rock music I listened to in my younger years! What with all of our modern inventions, our society is full of noise. The Noise Pollution Clearinghouse at www.nonoise.org says that “the word 'noise' is derived from the Latin word 'nausea,' meaning seasickness.” Indeed, some noise can maybe feels a little like nausea or seasickness. Speaking of sickness, the folks at The Noise Pollution Clearinghouse argue that, “Noise negatively affects human health and well-being. Problems related to noise include hearing loss, stress, high blood pressure, sleep loss, distraction and lost productivity, and a general reduction in the quality of life and opportunities for tranquility...”¹ Some claim that loss of hearing due to noise may also cause dementia.

In contrast to noise, our psalmist speaks words of encouragement when he says: “For God alone my soul waits in silence.” I don't know about you, but it seems the older I get the more I appreciate silence. The first thing I do in the morning, after eating breakfast, is to spend an hour or more (I don't keep track of the time) in

¹ Mickey Anders, “Count on God,” found at: <<https://www.deaconsil.com/>>.

silence—reading scripture and devotional material, followed by prayer time. This is my soulful silence time of waiting on God. For me it is a time when silence brings peace and well-being; a sense of closeness to the LORD; my body, mind and soul are renewed and prepared for the on-coming activities of the day. In the Bible, we learn that folks like the prophet Elijah, the apostle Paul, and Jesus himself all needed times of soulful silence with God to renew, strengthen and guide them in their personal lives and public ministries. Elijah went to a secluded place and heard God speaking to him in the sound of sheer silence. The apostle Paul says in Galatians 1:17, that after his Damascus road encounter with Jesus he went into Arabia—perhaps the desert there—for a time of soulful silence with God. Jesus, the gospels tell us, often got up early and spent a time in soulful silence with his heavenly Father. If Jesus who was the sinless Son of God had to spend time in soulful silence, how much more do we need to do the same! Just as Jesus' soulful silence gave him what he needed to accomplish the Father's will and purposes; soulful silence can and will do the same for us. So I encourage you to spend time in soulful silence for your physical, mental and spiritual health and well-being.

Among other blessings, the psalmist tells us that his time in soulful silence helped him realize that his hope came from God. God's gift of hope led the psalmist to speak of God as his rock, fortress and refuge.

The image of God as a rock may bring to mind several things. In biblical times, rocks, especially large ones were important. Large rocks could serve as a shade and shelter from the hot Middle Eastern sun. They were, of course, also used for building projects, such as fortresses, city walls, and the temple in Jerusalem. When we visited the Western Wall in Jerusalem, one of the things I noticed was how large the rocks were. All of these building projects that used rocks in biblical times most likely gave God's people a sense of security and safety in these buildings—hence they associated the symbol of a rock with God who was their ultimate security.

Another image that symbolized God's security and strength was a fortress. The English word fortress comes from the Latin word *fortis*, meaning strong. When we visited Edinburgh Castle. From the castle you have a bird's eye view in all directions. This castle/fortress certainly served the residents of Edinburgh well over the years,

keeping them safe and secure. The same is true of Martin Luther when he spent time in the Wartburg Castle. Here he was safe and secure and able to work on his translation of the Bible into German. His memories of that time at Wartburg Castle (along with Psalm 46 upon which his hymn is based) perhaps inspired him to write his famous hymn, A mighty fortress is our God. Like a fortress that showed its strength by protecting those inside of it from enemies on the outside—so the strength of God protected the psalmist in his times of trouble, when his adversaries tried their best to harm him.

The psalmist also refers to God as his refuge. When we think of refuge today, it likely reminds us of the ever-increasing number of refugees all over the world. They seek safety, security, and protection from danger and harm that often threatens their lives due to tyrannical governments, conflicts and wars, as well as natural disasters. Many of them turn to God as their ultimate refuge, because they can find no refuge elsewhere—or the refuge they do find is all too temporary and unreliable. In the psalmist's life, there were people and life circumstances that threatened him. He trusted and remained confident that even though there were likely times of trouble, doubt, uncertainty, and suffering in his life; he placed his ultimate security and hope in the LORD as his refuge.

During this time of COVID-19, you and your colleagues, family, friends, and neighbours may experience times of trouble, doubt, uncertainty and suffering, loss and grief. Where do you place your ultimate trust and confidence? Who or what is your refuge? May the God who created you and loves you; the God who has promised to be with you always; be your ultimate security and refuge.