

The Most High's Protection, Power and Promises

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

From ancient times the season of Lent has been kept as a time of special devotion, self-denial and humble repentance born of a faithful heart that dwells confidently on His Word and draws from it life and hope. Let us pray that our dear Father in heaven, for the sake of His beloved Son and in the power of His Holy Spirit, might richly bless this Lententide for us so that we may come to Easter with glad hearts and keep the feast in sincerity and truth.

These are the words of the traditional Ash Wednesday collect, words that prepare us well for this Lenten season. Indeed, may this be a time of special devotion for each of us.

This year's Lenten theme presents us with a special, unique and timely opportunity to find something that is sadly in short supply for many of us. In a word, that theme is "Rest." New to many of us is the Service of Compline that will be utilized for the evening service during these 40 days leading up to the Feast of the Resurrection. From that service, or office, we derive the theme of rest, and what a powerful message that is, for it parallels and prepares us for remembering Christ's own rest in the tomb.

The Psalms, Readings, Prayers and Hymns have all been carefully selected so that your ears hear the words of God for the express purpose of supporting and understanding the rest that is found in Him, and Him alone. And, of course, the homilies are written to bear these things in mind and, God-willing, declare to you the truths found in His Word.

These truths are clearly found in our chief text, Psalm 91, wherein like the children of Israel we, too, are exhorted to place our trust in God our

Refuge and our Fortress. Unlike many psalms, this psalm is not classically categorized by a particular category. It is not a psalm of lament, or praise or wisdom. Nor is it, as far as we know, a Psalm of David or of other recognizable authorship. But that isn't to say that it is less of a psalm by any means.

Keen listeners may recognize parts of this psalm from recent sermons or readings that declare Christ's victory over Satan when He was tempted in the desert. As it turns out, and not surprisingly, the Deceiver is familiar with passages from Scripture, most evidently Psalm 91, but more on that as well as the Psalm's connection to St. Michael and All Angels in a bit.

First, we do well to understand the truths declared in the Psalm. Hear again the words, and as you do, you are free to recognize His Protection, His Power and His Promises that are proclaimed.

First, His Protection is declared:

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."¹*

Words like shelter, refuge, fortress and trust are words that we routinely hear, read and sing, but the "*Shadow of the Almighty*" is a little less familiar. But don't let that scare you! Because He is Almighty, His shadow is a good place, a safe place, a place of rest where we can find protection in the Most High God. Of course, that is not to say that trouble cannot find us while we are in this earthly realm. There is no Theology of Glory found

¹ Psalm 91:1-2.

here that fools us into thinking we are exempt from the struggles against the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh. But we are protected from them as we abide in His refuge and fortress.

Next, the psalmist testifies of His God's Power. (This is a longer section, so please bear with the reading):

*For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence.
He will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
You will not fear the terror of the night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.
A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.
You will only look with your eyes
and see the recompense of the wicked.
Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place –
the Most High, who is my refuge –
no evil shall be allowed to befall you,
no plague come near your tent.²*

The Lord reminds us why He is Almighty and Most High when He describes His power over pestilence and destruction, and His mastery over fear, evil and plagues. But you are also free to hear again His words of comfort and rest as He promises to cover you, shield you and deliver you. We need not fear the terrors of this or any other night. He is our Refuge

² Psalm 91:3-10.

and in His Words we can always find deliverance. Let me say that another way: In The Word we have been delivered.

You may have been taught to hear of Christ in the Psalms. But even if you have not, you can rest in this knowledge – that Christ is the One in whom these words are fulfilled. There is only one way to the Father, and that is through His Son. It is only in Him that we are made right with the Father and are adopted into His family. If not for that, we would be on the wrong side of His wrath and power and would be counted among those thousands that fall and who will see their recompense, their just rewards, their punishment.

But thanks be to God, we are secure in Him and:

*(For) He will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.*

*On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.*

*You will tread on the lion and the adder;
the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.³*

When you hear these words, you are free to recall Christ's Temptation, for these are the words which Satan twisted to tempt our Savior. Of course, Satan is familiar with angels, since he was one himself. We would do well to regard him as an expert on the subject. No doubt, he knows that God's words for us aren't meant to cause confusion or suspicion. They are words of comfort that He has the power to command His angels, and remarkably and beautifully, He charges them to guard us

³ Psalm 91:11-13.

and to bear us up. The angels do His work, they protect us and, as one hymn writer says, they sing over us.

This too echoes the account of The Temptation in the Wilderness. For the gospel writers record that after Satan left Jesus, He was ministered to by angels.

Now, for what was promised about the tie to St. Michael and All Angels. It's not surprising that this 91st Psalm is the Psalm of the Day on the Festival of St. Michael and All Angels. Satan's feeble attempt to hijack these words of promise was quashed by the Son of God, and every time we celebrate that festival, we boldly declare again Christ's victory and Satan's defeat. So, at least twice a year, you dear hearers, are reminded of God's protection of you from Psalm 91.

As we do today/tonight when we hear again of God's Protection, and of His Power; and lastly of His Promises:

*"Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him;
I will protect him, because he knows my name.
When he calls to me, I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble;
I will rescue him and honor him.
With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation."*⁴

Did you hear all that He promises to do? The Most High, the Almighty, the All-Powerful I Am, gives you the blessed assurance that He will deliver, protect, answer, rescue, honor and satisfy those who hold fast to Him.

⁴ Psalm 91:14-15.

Can we even do that though? Can you, or can I, hold fast to Him without losing grip, losing hold or losing faith? The answer is yes, but only through the continued work of our Loving Father. To help us, He gives us His Word, His Spirit, Christ's Body and Blood, Holy Baptism, Confession and Absolution, and Prayer.

With these gifts, *because* of these gifts, we can lay claim to these promises. Not because we are worthy, but because we are declared worthy by our Maker. Only in Jesus, is this Psalm fulfilled. The deliverance, protection and honor are promises completed first in Him. But now they extend to you and to me, including that last promise – to show us His salvation! So at the end of this day, when it is time to rest –

My loved ones, rest securely,
For God this night will surely,
From peril guard your heads.
Sweet slumbers may He send you,
And bid His hosts attend you
And through the night watch o'er your beds.
Amen.

Lent 2019

Psalm 91

Catalina Lutheran Church

March 13, 2019

Faith Lutheran Church

April 3, 2019

Deacon Thomas Honebrink

Soli Deo Gloria