

3rd SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY
January 21, 2018

Text: Psalm 62
Theme: God Alone

I love to read a variety of books, and one in particular has been on my reading list for over a year. It is titled, *When Breath Becomes Air*. It is an autobiography written by a neurosurgeon who questions the meaning of life within the context of his vocation and later when he is diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. I have been hesitant to read it because I know how the story ends, and I tend to read more light-hearted books. Life offers me more than enough experiences with those deep-seeded emotions. I do not have a strong desire to go searching after them.

But now I want to read it, along with a book that came out in June that is titled, *The Bright Hour*. This story has the same theme with the same ending. So why all of a sudden would I put myself through these heart-wrenching experiences not once but twice?

One reason is because I recently learned that in both cases the stories do have a happy ending. It is a real life example of how out of death comes new life. It turns out that (after her husband passed away) the wife of the neurosurgeon became friends with the woman who wrote the second book. Prior to her death the second author encouraged her husband to lean on her new friend for support. More than a year later, the two surviving spouses have fallen in love. They go on book tours together and are making wedding plans.

A second reason I now want to read these books is because I ran across some quotes from each story that will definitely give me much to ponder. I offer you one example in particular:
One way to manage a terminal disease is to be deeply in love – to be vulnerable, kind, generous, and grateful.

When I hear quotes like that one (and there are others) my immediate response is to put it into the context of our relationship with God. If we can discover love for another human being that makes us so vulnerable, so kind, so generous, and so gracious ... then what words can we use to describe our deep love for God?

Out of all the readings for this Sunday I found those descriptive words in Psalm 62 along with its companions – Psalm 61 and 63. The three psalms together make a beautiful trilogy of an incredible love for (and trust in) God.

In the first psalm, we find the author at the end of his resources. His courage is spent and he is exhausted from whatever is happening in his life. He cries out to God in his despair because he knows God will be a refuge for him. He asks God to lead him to a high place where he can find shelter and protection.

And as if it were one continuous reading, we quickly enter the second psalm (our lesson for today), where the psalmist states unequivocally that his trust is in God alone.

God alone is his rock. God alone is his salvation.

God alone is his fortress. He will never be shaken.

As the neurosurgeon searched for the meaning of life (in the midst of his final days) the psalmist states with complete confidence that to put trust in anything but God is self-defeating. His trust in God gave him a peace in his soul more powerful and more hopeful than any distress caused by human circumstances. And he is so sure of his convictions that he repeats the litany all over again: God alone is his rock, solid and dependable, a sure foundation upon which to build his life. God is his salvation, the one who has the power to deliver him from anyone and anything that threatens his well-being. God alone is his fortress, where he is safe and secure from his enemies.

He will never be shaken.

What a wonderful personal testimony! How courageous I would be to join the psalmist and state with the same conviction that God is unmovable and my reliance on God makes me unshakable. All other things in this world are weak and erratic. Every human effort, every finite cause, every human relationship I have (no matter how beautiful it is) is not worthy of my complete trust. My vocation is so fulfilling and my children are so exceptional but it is all like shifting sand when compared to the power and authority of God.

There is no resting place for my heart other than in God alone.

Only when I start here (with God alone) will all of my other loyalties and all of my commitments have value and purpose. The God I love and trust is powerful and daily showers me with his deep love. It is the place I must start and end as I offer to you my personal witness.

But it is not enough for the psalmist to speak of how God has touched his life. He turns to the community of faith around him and he urges them to understand that nothing we have and hold (nothing we have gained on earth) can offer us the ultimate security that comes from God alone. The rich cannot secure their lives by the things they amass. The poor cannot secure their lives by getting what the rich and powerful have. Both are equally vulnerable. Both are equally fleeting.

So we all turn and face God and declare with equal conviction that God alone is our rock. God alone is our salvation. God alone is our fortress. We will not be shaken. We proclaim our trust in God to a very uncertain and precarious world. Our faith does not shut its eyes to the assaults that surround us. Our faith does not place its trust in those who seem to have everything under control. Our faith clings to (and relies on) the living God alone.

God is the only source of hope and peace for us.
If our lives have any significance, it is in God alone.

A word of caution: Our deep love for God plus our deep trust in him will not magically change our circumstances. However, I assure you that God will give us the grace to work through whatever we are facing. In Scripture, trust in God grows out of his love for us. God is committed to us. God cares for us. Our trust in his love will weather any storm. This is the good news for today. This is what will enable each and every one of us to wait for the Lord, not in a passive resignation to the powers that be, but in eager anticipation of every new epiphany that is revealed to us.

God alone is our rock. God alone is our salvation.

God alone is our fortress. We shall never be shaken.

And what does the third psalm offer at the end of this trilogy? After the psalmist makes himself vulnerable before God and declares with confidence his complete trust that God will be gracious to him, the third psalm returns to a personal prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

O God, you are my God. It is only you I seek.
My soul thirsts for you. My soul clings to you.
I will lift up my hands and call upon your name.
Your steadfast love is better than life itself.
And I will bless you for as long as I live.

In God alone will we have happy endings to our stories.
Amen