

Intro

Good evening. I'm Kathy Proudlove and I'm the children's pastor here. When Chris asked if I would speak this week I instantly agreed. And then I instantly regretted it. I am a story teller, not a preacher, but I am always up for a challenge. I figured that planning a sermon can't be much different than preparing a children's lesson, right? A few embarrassing stories, some scripture and a craft, sounds about right. OK, I won't make you do a craft. but I have to say that it has been a lot of fun to prepare for this evening. I think I came up with a bit more of a reflection than a sermon, but here we go.

When Chris asked me to pick a psalm to preach on I started to re-read the psalms, looking for my favourite and quickly realizing that I don't have a favourite. So many of the psalms have impacted me at different times of my life. Then I came to psalm 56 and knew it was the one I wanted to speak on. A ton of memories came rushing back when I read the first verse. My first Bible school introduction to psalm 56 was during the first week of college when our resident assistant suggested that our wing of the dorm pick psalm 56:1a as our theme verse. At the time she was using the 1995 NIV translation which reads this way: Be merciful to me, O God, for men hotly pursue me. We of course thought that this was the best verse for our wing of the dorm and quickly made it known to the entire population of the campus that we were willing to suffer this fate as well.

But as I have been drawn back to the psalm time and time again I have grown to love it for more than the opening line. I am going to read the psalm to you out of the Bibles that are in front of you and if you would like to follow along it is found on page 840.

For the choir director: A psalm[a] of David, regarding the time the Philistines seized him in Gath. To be sung to the tune “Dove on Distant Oaks.”

1 O God, have mercy on me,
for people are hounding me.

My foes attack me all day long.

2 I am constantly hounded by those who slander me,
and many are boldly attacking me.

3 But when I am afraid,
I will put my trust in you.

4 I praise God for what he has promised.
I trust in God, so why should I be afraid?
What can mere mortals do to me?

5 They are always twisting what I say;
they spend their days plotting to harm me.

6 They come together to spy on me—
watching my every step, eager to kill me.

7 Don't let them get away with their wickedness;
in your anger, O God, bring them down.

8 You keep track of all my sorrows.[b]
You have collected all my tears in your bottle.
You have recorded each one in your book.

9 My enemies will retreat when I call to you for help.

This I know: God is on my side!

10 I praise God for what he has promised;

yes, I praise the Lord for what he has promised.

11 I trust in God, so why should I be afraid?

What can mere mortals do to me?

12 I will fulfill my vows to you, O God,

and will offer a sacrifice of thanks for your help.

13 For you have rescued me from death;

you have kept my feet from slipping.

So now I can walk in your presence, O God,

in your life-giving light.

Like many of the psalms this one starts off with the psalmist calling out to God for help.

David, the author finds himself in trouble with his enemies. He has fled from Saul and

his home to the city of Gath, a Philistine city, where he expected to be safe from Saul.

But a new enemy arose. The officials of Gath were none too pleased to have David

hanging out in their city and they started to talk and murmur about him. David was

afraid of what they would do to him. He was afraid for his life. You can read more about

the situation that David was in when he was inspired to write this psalm in 1 Samuel 21.

In psalm 56 David is distressed and calling out to God for protection from his enemies.

Yet even in his fear he has great trust that God will protect him and responds in the

psalm with verses 3 and 4 "But when I am afraid, I will put my trust in you. I will praise

God for what he has promised. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me?"

Yet even after just uttering such bold statements it seems like fear takes him over again and he calls out, asking God to bring down his enemies as he states in verse 7. He asks God to punish them in His anger. He seems to be reminding God in the middle of this psalm that he has suffered much already and that God has been watching and recording all of his pain and his wanderings. And it seems like it this reminder of past and present fears and sorrows that prompts David to remember that God is on his side, his enemies will flee when he calls on the name of the Lord. And he repeats, in verse 11 what has become one of my favourite verses to remember "I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me?"

Well what does that mean for us? How can we relate to this psalm? As kids we often feel like we have enemies and that they are just as real of a threat in our minds as what David was experiencing. Some times it is the kid who lives next door, the bully on the playground or that substitute teacher that no one can get along with. And as kids we often pray like David, that our enemies will be 'brought down in God's anger'. Well more accurately we pray that the teacher gets fired, the bully gets a taste of his own medicine or the kid next moves as far away as possible. I remember as a kid one my enemies was a substitute teacher who we would have a couple of times a year. She wasn't always very nice and would often yell at the students and I just hated it when she would teach. What made matters worse is that she came to the church that I attended

and would call on me more often, at least it felt that way, and she would also try to socialize with me before or after class which caused me much grief from the other children in the class. Every time that I would see her walk into class I would cringe and silently pray that she was hit with suddenly with the stomach flu and would need to go home. There were also times that I prayed that I would be hit with the stomach flu and would need to go home, but alas neither situation ever happened. As I grew older and matured a little I over came my fear and dislike of this teacher. I even became good friends with her son and could go over to her house without wishing that I could get the stomach flu in the middle of supper.

When I first started thinking about this passage I would have said that we as adults don't typically have enemies. But as I have been thinking about my own life in the last 15 years I can say that I have felt like I have had at least one enemy. I'm not going to ask for a show of hands but I can imagine that I am not alone in this. There are times that we have people in our lives that slander us, make fun of us, ignore us or do everything in their power to make our lives miserable.

Now I have to say from my own experience that even though it felt like my enemy went out of her way to say mean and hurtful things to me daily, I am sure that some of her 'pure evilness' was imagined by me. I'm sure that my own emotions and insecurities would magnify what she said, until it felt like she was out to get me. She was my boss and my car pool ride, so we spent 8 hours a day working together and almost 3 hours riding together, stuck in a tiny car. Things started out great, but by the end of a year

things had changed. She had changed. Maybe i had changed. She started to say really hurtful things, and made it very much known that I was nothing but an inconvenience to her and that she hated car pooling with me. There was more than one time, well more times than I care to admit actually, that the moment I left her car and got into the house I broke down and cried. I dreaded going to work in the mornings and I found myself back to wishing for the stomach flu. I prayed for vengeance, I prayed she would get fired, I prayed that she would be swept off her feet by a wealthy business man who would take her away to New York or Paris, anything to get her away from me. I don't recall calling out in faith like David, knowing that God was there already helping me in that situation. In the end I just quit.

Ok, what about those times that there is no person out there trying to make your life miserable? What makes you call out to God like David did? I believe that there are many things that act like enemies in ours lives. They are different for each of us. For some it is addiction, that ever present desire drink, or gamble. For others it is loneliness, that feeling of emptiness that comes with sitting alone wondering if the phone is going to ring. Waiting for some response from those desperate emails and messages left. Waiting for someone to remember that they are alive. Maybe it unemployment. As the bills come in, the fear of not knowing how they are going to get paid becomes over whelming. How can one provide for a family without work? What if the power gets cut off? What if we get evicted? What if work doesn't come soon? Then there is anger, depression, cancer and the list can go on. I believe that these and many others are

things that should cause us to call out to God in a similar fashion to David, pleading for help, trusting for His rescue and praising for His faithfulness.

I've always enjoyed the Psalms for how David is so honest. He is so real and even angry at times. He pleads for the destruction of his enemies, asking God to call down his wrath and wipe them from the face of the earth. I often wish that I had the guts to pray this way, to truly say to God what I feel, knowing that He is large enough and gracious enough to hear my anger. But too often I try to pray the polite way, "dear God, if you could maybe do something about the not nice situation I'm in, if you know it is not too much trouble, that would be good. please and thank-you". Not at all like David's angry, fearful pleas. But in this psalm David doesn't stay with angry. He moves into confident statements about the Lord's provision. Statements like "I trust in God so why should I be afraid?" That statements sounds very much like something I would tell Oscar, my son, before he goes to bed or after he has a night mare, but isn't always the first statement that rolls through my head in a tight situation. David praises God for his faithfulness to him, knowing that God will fulfil his promise. How often do I turn to praise in times of trouble? I call out, sure, I ask for help but I far too often I find that I do not turn to praise until the situation is resolved. I don't praise in the middle of trouble. I don't seem to praise God for what he has yet to do, only what he has done for me already.

I have been really challenged by this realization over the past few weeks as I have been prepping for this reflection. And I have tried to pay attention to my prayers, what they

like. I am not a person who journals. I have always wanted to be. Man I wish that I was that person who could just spend hours upon hours in quiet time with the Lord, writing away in their prayer journal, but I have come to realize that that is just not me. And that is ok. But I have been trying to keep track of what my prayer life consists of. Not how long or how often I pray, but what my attitude during prayer is. Am I always asking to be rescued from strife? Am I praising God for things that I have seen in my life? I do both, but I wanted to add in praise for things not yet done, for the promises that he had made. I have found it challenging to do that. Its challenging for me to be so confident in what God has promised that I am praising him for future resolution to situations I can't yet see the end to. And I have been finding that reading the psalms is helping me remember that God is a God who keeps his promises and that I can have faith and praise him even before the situation has been resolved.

Okay in my time of paying attention to my prayers I started to write a 'psalm-like' poem in my non-existent prayer journal. Well actually I sat straight up in bed, grabbed my phone and typed in the notepad app. I am not a writer and did not sit down with the intention of writing a poem but I found this activity very interesting and rather revealing. To be honest I was surprised at what came tumbling out as my current enemies. I promised you that I would not make you do a craft, but I never said that I wouldn't give you home work. I am encouraging you to write your own psalm like poem some time in your life. Doesn't have to be in a prayer journal, or anywhere fancy, but I encourage you to do it. Just once write out your fears and your requests, your trust and your praises.

And if you have the guts, share it with someone. I warn you, they can get pretty personal and pretty revealing. I don't have the guts, so I will not share mine from here.

So what about the end of the psalm 56? David starts with fear but ends with praise for what God has done. Verses 12 and 13 say this: I will fulfill my vows to you, O God, and will offer a sacrifice of thanks for your help. For you have rescued me from death; you have kept my feet from slipping. So now I can walk in your presence, O God, in your life giving light”

It is with this verse that I want us to head into a time of reflection I don't know where you are today, if you are fighting enemies or praising God for rescuing you but as we move into the response time I encourage you to reflect on where you are at. Do you call out to God when things get tough? Are you only pleading for rescue, or do you turn to praise, even before the situation is resolved? Maybe you are not in a place to do either right now. You might find that you are in a place where you need some space, you are welcome to move out to find a place to pray or think. There are some notepads up here if you'd like to write out some thoughts or prayer. And here in the centre is the table. The table is a reminder of how Christ has rescued us from death. Not a physical death but a spiritual death. And our act of coming to the table, a physical reminder of the grace that is offered, is one way that we state with confidence that God is working in our lives, even if we don't see it or understand it. We can come to the table knowing that Christ has rescued us from death, he is keeping our feet from slipping and that we can walk in his life giving light, even in the midst of our enemies.

In few moments the worship team will come up and will play some songs that are designed to help you respond to what God is saying to you. You can come up as you feel led, break off a piece of the bread and dip it into the cup. There are hand sanitizers up front here as well as in the back and a gluten free option as we don't want anything to hinder someone from coming to the table.

Let's pray