

# I Will Call Upon the Lord

## INTRODUCTION

Sometimes there is nothing left to do but sing. Does that sound odd? It is said of the Methodist movement that we were born in song. We sing our faith, and our songs are about calling out to God. This late summer/early fall we turn to the song book that has sustained and defined the people of God from the very beginning – the Psalms. The Psalms give words to a variety of emotions and circumstances out of which we call upon the Lord. We shape our worship around these words to give voice to people in our communities who may feel unheard even by God. The witness of the Psalms is that God is prepared to meet us where we are. So let us call upon the Lord.

### Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost – *God Knows My Name*

September 7, 2025

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

Color – Green

## PLANNING NOTES

*Seen. Heard. Known.* However you put it, we humans long for relationships where we trust others to care about who we are, what we feel, and how we experience the world. We want to *belong*, and one of the key ways we create belonging is to search and know each other. Today's psalm reading describes this process of creating belonging between God and us. I remember when I was growing up, I believed that God loved me because God *had* to love me, God is *obligated* to love me. As I grew up and studied more of the Bible, I slowly realized that God *wants* to love me. God searches and knows me—knows us—because God desires to love us and build belonging with us.

As you begin planning worship for this Sunday, consider what tools and traditions you have to create belonging in your congregation. What affirmation of faith carries a special meaning for your congregants? What song is known and loved by your community? What artwork was handcrafted by your members for use in worship? What ritual act (i.e., passing the peace, prayers of the people, etc.) is especially loved in your congregation? Whatever your answers might be, do them! Give them extra time or tell a story about why this song, prayer, or act is meaningful. Remind the congregation of their story together. These are all ways that recall and build on belonging in our churches.

Since this is the first Sunday of the month, consider how you will engage the sacrament of Holy Communion as a place where we create belonging with God and one another. Incorporate parts of Psalm 139 into the Communion liturgy. Talk about the United Methodist theology of Communion during the sermon. If your church has used or is planning to use Discipleship Ministries' [Belong resources](#) in small groups, Sunday school, or other settings, consider how to highlight those opportunities during the service, particularly the resources on Holy Communion. Give the ritual space to breathe. Take your time at the Table to meet God and one another in the holy sharing of bread and cup. Make sure that anything you explain with words is then experienced and expressed in action during worship because belonging is not merely a mental exercise but a fully embodied searching, knowing, and embracing of love of God and neighbor.

## PREACHING NOTES

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

Search me. I don't even know if we say that anymore. "Search me!" Shows you how far out of coolness I am these days. Ah, well. But I remember saying it all the time. Search me. It has probably been replaced by the ubiquitous "whatever" by now. Search me.

It was a "I don't know" kind of thing. It was an admission of ignorance, and maybe of complacency. Search me. It refers to what we don't know. Not something we like admitting these days. Are we in an age of certainty? It is hard to state that there is something beyond our understanding or experience or knowledge.

One of the problems the church has these days, I think, is that we are no longer sure what we believe. We want to move beyond a childish faith, and we want to incorporate all that human beings have learned about how the world works – and how we work – and yet we keep being told that what we've learned about the world can't fit into what we believe about God. They don't match, the bump up against each other and something has got to go. Unfortunately, for most of us, what has gone is diligent theological thought. Which isn't the same as saying we've lost our faith. We just don't think about it all that much anymore. We can't make it work, so we don't bother. What do you believe about God? Search me. That's what many have come to these days. It is just easier. Search me.

Of course, search me is also used in another way. The way that Psalm 139 uses it. And maybe it is that searching, or the acknowledgment of God's searching that might help us reclaim our faith as a reasonable part of our existence. Can faith be reasonable? Does that make sense? Search me.

No, wait. I didn't mean that. Of course it can. To a degree, anyway. There is always something beyond knowledge about faith, even Psalm 139 admits that. The Psalm ends with an admission that knowing all of God is beyond us. But it begins with the affirmation that being known by God is the nature of the relationship. In fact, the essence of the Psalm is the declaration that the only knowledge of God accessible is in relationship.

In our creeds and in the Lord's Prayer we are reminded that we call God Father. This is not to reduce God to a human role, but to lift humans by acknowledging that the parenting role is a part of the divine. So, whether we are father or mother, whether we care for birth children or adopted children or children baptized into the family of God, we reflect an aspect of God. We believe that God cares and so we do too.

We are also reminded by our liturgy that God is creator, and that all of creation has a single point of origin. But however we understand that creation to have taken place, we worship God as creator of all there is. We can argue methodology, and we do, but there need be no conflict with the article of faith that claims God as creator.

Then there is that term that appears in liturgy – Almighty. What does that mean? Search me. No, wait. It means that there is more to God than I can grasp with my understanding. It means that I trust in the power of God even when I can't sense it. It means I believe in the power of God even when it seems God

has lost a grip on the world God created. It means I will spend my days seeking evidence of that power and that presence with confidence and with hope.

But why all this struggle to understand God in the first place? Why do we seek the face of God? Why do we want to know God's will? Curiosity? Well, perhaps, but there is more to it. We seek God because God has sought us. That's what Psalm 139 tells us. And the gospels tell us. And Paul's letters tell us. That is what the doctrine of Incarnation tells us. That this amazing, almighty, unknowable God, knows us. Seeks us. Loves us. What an incredible thing. And it isn't that God knows about us. That God has some scientific or sociological interest in humanity. No, we believe, we claim that God knows us. Intimately and personally. We are known.

Whenever we encounter someone who shows interest in us as human beings, as a real person, who wants to know the real us, then of course we are going to want to know that person. We call upon the Lord, because the Lord has called upon us. O Lord, you have searched me, and known me. Let me in my own small way return the favor.

## **LITURGICAL RESOURCES**

### **Call to Worship**

Wherever you go, from the top of the highest mountain or into the deep abysses of the earth, God knows you.

**Wherever we go, God knows our name.**

Whatever you do, from the time you wake up until you lay your head down again, God knows you.

**Whatever we do, God knows our name.**

However you live, from your inner thoughts to your public acts and everything in between, God knows you.

**However we live, God knows our name.**

We gather to worship God, who loves us, knows us, and calls us by name.

**We gather to worship God, for we are fearfully and wonderfully made by God who knows our name!**

*Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, March 2025.*

## **Opening Prayer**

All-knowing God,

We gather together with praise and thanksgiving

for who You are,

and for all that You have done for us.

You know us better than we know ourselves—

all our thoughts and actions—

and yet You love us.

No matter where we go or what we do,

Your love encircles us—ahead and behind—

gently leading and guiding and blessing.

We praise You for Your love

and Your faithful presence in our lives.

May Your Spirit move in our hearts and minds as we worship together—

examine our attitudes and actions,

lay bare the things we need to confess,

challenge us with Your Word,

and guide us on to paths that lead to life.

For we are Your people, called by Your name.

Amen.

*Posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2011/07/opening-prayer-psalm-139.html>.*

### **Prayer of Confession**

Holy God,

we confess that we do not always love our neighbor.

We confess that we have despised others,  
even to the point of hatred.

We confess that we have been hurt by others.

We confess that forgiveness and reconciliation at times  
are just impossible for us.

We know that nothing is impossible in You.

We come to You, seeking healing and wholeness for us.

Help us, whenever possible, to live in peace with others,  
to seek reconciliation and healing and forgiveness.

For Your Son came and lived among us,  
was betrayed and denied,  
abused and put to death.

He rose again

and came with the message of peace to those  
who had denied him and abandoned him.

May we walk in his ways. Amen.

### **Assurance of Pardon**

For nothing is impossible with God.

There is no place you can go,  
no end of the earth you can run,  
where God cannot find you.

There is nothing on earth or beyond death  
that can separate you from the love of God  
in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You are forgiven.

You are loved.

You are reconciled to God.

Go and live with the love of God. Amen.

*Written by Rev. Mindi and posted on **Rev-o-lution**, <http://rev-o-lution.org/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2017/02/prayer-of-confession-loving-others.html>.*

### **Benediction**

May you go from this place carrying the blessing and assurance that the Triune God, Creator of the universe, knows your name. Amen.

*Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, April 2024.*

## Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost – *Our Hope is in the Lord*

September 14, 2025

Psalm 14

Color – Green

### PLANNING NOTES

How do we find hope? How do we *keep* hope? In Psalm 14, hope happens somewhere in the space between the comma and the “but”: “You would confound the plans of the poor, **but** the LORD is their refuge” (Psalm 14:6). *But* God. *But* the good news. *But* grace. We find and keep hope when we name all that is hard in our world, take a breath, and then remember, *but* God.

So, what kind of “but God” moments can we bring into worship this week? Psalm 14 certainly opens us to the need for confession, a prayerful and corporate way to tell the truth about the world around—and the world inside—us to God and one another. Consider using a song to frame or guide corporate confession, such as “Confession” (*Worship and Song*, 3138). Pair the confession and assurance of pardon with the passing of the peace as a reminder that our presence with one another in the struggles of this world is an act of grace and good news. God is with us when we gather together. This is also an excellent Sunday to have a member of the congregation share their own “but God” moments in the form of a testimony. When we share the stories of what God has done in our lives, we encourage one another to live in hope instead of despair, to recall and remember the times that we have found our refuge and hope in God.

We encourage you to think of ways to invite the congregation to respond to the proclamation with their own “but God” statements. Perhaps during the sermon, ask congregants to write down their version of the psalmist’s “but God” and have them place their notes in the offering plate. Then, have the preacher read some of the statements aloud as part of the benediction or share a few of the statements (anonymously) in that week’s church newsletter. This is also an excellent exercise to invite congregants to do during the week through a social media post. Alternatively, you might include a bulletin insert with “But God...” at the top, followed by lines for people to fill in the blanks. Encourage them to keep those bulletin inserts in their Bibles, on their refrigerators, or anywhere they might see them during the week as a reminder that God is our refuge and hope.

## PREACHING NOTES

### Psalm 14

Where does hope come from? Admittedly the word doesn't appear in Psalm 14. Perhaps we should have said titled this week's resources "Our refuge is in the Lord." That at least would echo the text a little more closely. But no, we stayed with hope. As if such a thing was possible. As if there could be, might be, should be a source of hope, no matter what might be going on around us.

If you are struggling with all that is going on around you these days, then you have a soul friend in the writer of the 14<sup>th</sup> Psalm. You just have to read the first verse of the psalm to realize that. This is someone struggling to find anything of value in the world as it is. This is someone who despairs that there is anyone who looks at life with the eyes of faith. Take the opening line:

*Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is no one who does good.*

*(Psalm 14:1 NRSV)*

That is someone who is so fed up with what is seen from top to bottom in society. There is no one who does good. You know that feeling. You know that response. No one. Utter despair. This is lament at its deepest level.

Or maybe it is a polemic and not a lament. Maybe it is a pronouncement, a prophetic utterance against the failing of the people of God. Notice the opening words "fools say in their hearts." This isn't a rant about the new atheists, those who espouse their disgust for belief. This isn't an argument against the heretics, or secular humanists, or whatever terminology you want to use to describe those folk out there. No, in their hearts they say there is no God. These are people who claim to believe but live as though there is no God. They are functional atheists. They might profess God but show no evidence in their lives that God has any hold over them, any authority for them. They might be leaders; they might be priests or politicians or celebrities claiming to be bringing God back to the nation. But in fact, as evidenced by their actions and their values and their choices, they are opposing the very God they proclaim.

Fools, the psalmist calls them. Not the fool that makes mistakes or stumbles as they walk, not the fool who doesn't have all the information or can't think it through. These fools are ones who have chosen to oppose the will of God. The ones, perhaps, who have put themselves and their own purposes in the place of the God they still profess. Their foolishness seems like wisdom in the world, they are getting ahead, they are successful. Yet the wisdom that God seeks is something different. The measure of success is different in God's kingdom.

Well, we could go on, and the psalmist does go on bemoaning what the eyes reveal about how the world works, about who rises to the top, who gets the glory. We could go on, and frankly there is an inclination to do so. We rant and rave, we point fingers and call out sinners as we see them. And maybe there is some need for that. We do need to speak up against the foolishness of the day and those who are advocating foolishness, as risky as that is. But we are at our core proclaimers of good news. That's our defining identity. The psalmist gives voice to the pain of living in a broken world, but is also able to return to hope.

That hope is in the identity of God. The God we make space for in our inner lives is the God who is a refuge for the poor. The we call upon is the God who promises deliverance, the God of restoration. So we preach the God of Someday. But we preach the God of today, as we share and live into the fortunes that are already ours. The fortunes of community and relationship, of forgiveness and transformation are the signs of God at work in us, they are a part of the good that we are doing for ourselves and for those around us. This good work that the psalmist looks for is good that ripples out. It isn't a selfish or singular good. It is a communal and redemptive good. The rejoicing comes corporately, the gladness is in the community. And we have tastes of it even now and even here. We rejoice from time to time, we are glad when it is time to come into the house of the Lord, and the house of the Lord, we are told, is any time two or three gather together.

That is the source of our hope. That is the promise we live every day. That is what equips us, not to ignore the foolishness of the world around us, but to not fall into despair because of it. We call upon the Lord of hope, of refuge. That is how we navigate the current foolishness. We live in hope.

## **LITURGICAL RESOURCES**

### **Call to Worship**

We come seeking refuge in a world where goodness and good news can feel far away.

**God is our hope and our refuge.**

We come searching for safety in a world that often calls foolishness wisdom and wisdom foolishness.

**God is our hope and our refuge.**

We come longing for rest in a world that bombards us with all the ways people work against the abundant life and flourishing of their neighbors.

**God is our hope and our refuge.**

Come, children of God, to find refuge and hope in God who delivers and restores us.

**May God teach us and guide us to find refuge and be refuge with and for our neighbors today and every day.**

*Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, April 2025.*

## Opening Prayer

This world would deny you, Lord,  
and rely on human wisdom  
in their search for answers  
to questions they have yet to ask,  
but we will praise you,  
and exalt your name,  
for we know that you are Alpha,  
the beginning of all things,  
and Omega,  
the end,  
and all that is between.  
We have known your healing.  
We have known your provision.  
We have known your victory.  
Our sorrow has turned into dancing  
and our tears to songs of joy.  
We shall praise you ever more. Amen

*Written by John Birch and posted on **Faith and Worship**, <http://www.faithandworship.com/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/06/affirmation-alpha-and-omega.html>.*

## Prayer of Confession

O Most Patient God,  
  
we recognize how much we need you for life itself.  
  
But how often have we behaved  
  
as if we did not know or even care about you?  
  
How often have we become the ones who do not carry out justice?  
  
How often have we tried to dominate others,  
  
even as you stand with them?  
  
How often have we participated in the desolation of your creation  
  
by our treatment of the heavens, the earth, and its waters?  
  
Forgive us for these times when we have lost our way.  
  
All Loving God, we want to be among those whom you seek.  
  
Shower your mercy upon us.  
  
Find us and lead us safely home to faithfulness.

### **Words of Assurance**

My friends, when we are lost, all is not lost.

God is seeking us, ready to turn our lives around,

Gathering us in to the people of God.

Let us rejoice in God's mercy! Amen.

Written by Henrietta Stith Andrews, in *From Despair to Rejoicing: Service Prayers for the 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost*. Posted on the **Worship Ways** website, <http://www.ucc.org/worship/worship-ways/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/08/confession-luke-15-1-10.html>.

### **Benediction**

May God bless you with the clarity to recognize the world as it is, the hope to dream God's dream together, and the power to make God's dream a reality here and now. Amen.

*Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, April 2025.*

## **Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost – *For the Glory***

September 21, 2025

Psalm 79:1-9

Color – Green

### **PLANNING NOTES**

If it's been a while since your congregation engaged with the psalms for an extended time, they may now be ready for the joyful, happy psalms. However, that's not what this week (or the next) presents us. Far from victorious or jubilant, the first half of Psalm 79 reads like a list of social media headlines and nightly news reports, viscerally true reports of the chaos we humans create for ourselves and the worry that we will never find our way out of the harm we've done to ourselves. We have enough of this in our daily life. Can't scripture give us a bit of a break, a quiet respite from the chaos surrounding us?

But keep reading. The complaints and the laments lead us to the simplest but often most meaningful prayer: Help us. This is the difference between the media and the Psalms. More often than not, social media, twenty-four-hour news, and current events podcasts tell us what's going wrong. And we need that information when it comes from trusted sources. But the Psalms show us how to tell the truth about the world in the context of the truth about God. And the truth about God is that God shows up for us.

We can learn a lot from Psalm 79 about how to address the difficulties of our world in worship. We must tell the truth about the pain, suffering, and dysfunction in our communities, our nation, and the world. Worship is not an escape from the world but a place where we are edified and equipped to live as the people of God in the world. We must not stop at telling the truth about our world, because God's truth has and will set us free from the chaos and pain that surrounds us. So, as you plan the prayers, rituals, songs, and proclamation for this Sunday, remind yourself and your congregation that *God helps*. Our hope and perseverance to continue in the face of all the world throws at us comes not from our strength or our faith in human leaders, but in our belief that God hears our cries, knows our pain, and actively loves and helps us through it all.

### **PREACHING NOTES**

Psalm 79:1-9

Early one New Years morning I received a call from the chaplain of the hospital in the next town asking me to come quickly to the trauma center. I navigated the quiet streets that chilly morning and found myself sitting with a family facing a terrible tragedy. Our church hosted an all-night New Year's Eve lock-in, culminating in the sacrament of communion as one year ended and another began. After attempting to "require" everyone to get some sleep, my youth pastor served breakfast and pronounced benediction on the event and sent them all home. Along the way, one of the older youth lost control of the car and he and his sister crashed into a telephone poll a few miles from their home. The young man was pronounced dead at the scene and his sister was driven to the nearby trauma center as they tried desperately to help her cling to life. I was there with the family as the machines finally gave up and she too was pronounced dead while her mother wept and patted her face calling her name over and over.

In a lecture titled “Preaching Your Way Through an Apocalypse,” theologian Cody Sanders of Luther Seminary in Minneapolis said, “the world is always ending for someone.” (Festival of Homiletics, May 2023). The world of one family ended in a devastating way that New Years morning. Like the writer of Psalm 79, they stood in the rubble of what was once a happy family and wondered why. They felt abandoned, broken, hurt and angry. In days to come they would look for someone to blame, a reason behind the ruin.

*“How long, O Lord? Will you be angry forever? Will your jealous wrath burn like fire?”*

*Psalm 79:5 NRSV*

Was God really angry? Was their sin the source of their disaster? Does it really matter? We ask these questions in difficult moments. We blame others, we blame ourselves. We even blame God, because we think that will bring us peace. Or that it will change the circumstances. If we could only figure out who to blame, all would be well. Who is our enemy, or what is my sin that caused this to happen? Where should I direct my anger? Who is to blame? That is one of those lies we tell ourselves. That’s one of the practices human communities have engaged in since the beginning of time. The scapegoat who carries our sins into the desert to die. Psalm 79 is raw, visceral stuff, maybe too much for worship. The lectionary framers think so, and attempted to soften it by cutting the psalm in half. Do we dare read the whole psalm? Or is the vengeance called for too much for modern congregations raised on being nice as the ultimate witness of faith?

Perhaps that is unfair. While we may have trouble dealing with some extreme emotional experiences, we still seek to be the church to the whole person, don’t we? And crying out to God, is a part of the experience of hurting people. Calling for vengeance is a part of our culture, as well as deep within the humanness of each of us. We shouldn’t be shocked or offended by it. Neither should we attempt to defend God. God is capable of provide all the defense needed. God meets us where we are. Always.

But wait. What about glory? The psalmist asks God for deliverance for God’s own glory. This is not how we usually understand glory, is it? Glory is seen in power, right? It is seen in miracles, in the supernatural. We want to see the glory that takes our breath away. Instead, Psalm 79 says we the glory – God’s own glory – we need is that which helps us. It is that which delivers and forgives. When God acts like God, in other words. When God reveals God’s self to us in the small but transformative ways that bring us back from the edge, that stand with us in the rubble, even the rubble that we caused ourselves God’s glory is seen and known. We can be confident that God will always act in a way that is true to God’s nature. And that nature is glorious.

What is incredible about this psalm is that in the end there is praise in sight. There is gratitude on the horizon. Granted it is a far horizon and a conditional one at that. But still, there is the acknowledgement that that is our destination, or maybe our purpose: to praise God and enjoy – live in gratitude with this divine. That in the rubble, with the bodies still in sight, even a conditional praise seems better than nothing, doesn’t it?

What is the thrust of the sermon then? That depends, it seems, on whether you are standing in the rubble or viewing it from afar. Empathy would be the heart and the invitation to lament offered. With a little distance, it might be possible to reflect on the nature of God and what is felt as anger might be presence in difficult circumstance. The God to whom we call upon is a God who walks with us through the rubble of this existence, even when we don’t sense that presence. Even when it seems like that

presence is anything but supportive. Even when it feels angry at us. Or the world. Still, we will call upon the Lord.

## **LITURGICAL RESOURCES**

### **Call to Worship**

When we are surrounded on every side, wondering which way is up and which way is down...

**Help us, God, for the glory of your name.**

When we question which way to go and how to follow God's path for us...

**Help us, God, for the glory of your name.**

When we find our rest in God and long for others to know the sweet peace of God's embrace...

**Help us, God, for the glory of your name.**

Today, as we gather for worship, may we come ready to listen and discern God's help that meets us right where we are.

**Help us, God, to receive your help and to extend your help to our neighbors, all for the glory of your name.**

*Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, April 2025.*

### **Opening Prayer**

Loving and Gracious God—Holy one of Israel—

tender one to all who call upon you with repentant and believing hearts:

bless us, we pray, with your presence this day.

Teach the little ones who have gathered to learn your ways,

inspire those who seek your wisdom, energize those who are exhausted,

comfort those who grieve, and strengthen those who are weak.

Indeed, O God, fill all of our hearts with your praise

and lead us in holiness and righteousness in this hour

and in the hours to come.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Written by Rev. Richard J. Fairchild and posted on the **Kir-shalom website**. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/08/opening-prayer-bless-us-we-pray.html>.*

### **Prayer of Confession**

God, do not remember against us  
the iniquities of our ancestors.

**Forgive us, merciful God,  
for our history of violence.**

Let your compassion come speedily to meet us,  
for we are brought low.

**With haste come to us,  
for we are bent beneath the weight of war-making.**

Help us, O God of our salvation,  
for the glory of your name.

**Rescue us, O Wind of the Spirit,  
from the sea of despair.**

Deliver us and forgive us our sins,  
for your name's sake.

**Jesus, have mercy on our nation,  
for the sake of God's reign. Amen.**

*Written by Leo Hartshorn, in A Service of Lament (adapted slightly). Posted on the **Peace and Justice Support Network of Mennonite Church USA**. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/08/confession-litany-psalm-79-8-9.html>.*

### **Benediction**

Go now, in the blessing of God who covers you, protects you, delivers you, and helps you that you might reflect God's glory as you love and serve others. Amen.

*Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, April 2025.*

## **Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost – *Safety in the Shadow of the Lord***

September 28, 2025

Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16

Color – Green

### **PLANNING NOTES**

I was a teenager when I first encountered Psalm 91, and I loved the idea that reading Psalm 91:1 was like calling 9-1-1: “You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty...” There is a sense of safety and security, a feeling that somehow everything will be okay. That’s definitely the feeling I want to feel if I have to call 9-1-1, and let’s face it, there are a lot of emergencies in our world right now, many of which are bigger than a whole fleet of fire trucks can fix.

Verse 1 acts as the thesis statement for Psalm 91, the lens through which everything else should be read. God delivers because God is our shelter. God covers us with pinion because we abide in God. God will rescue us when we call because we live in God’s shadow. There is wisdom in verse 1 that we should carry into worship planning, namely that people need to feel safe and secure to be brave. Notice that the psalmist encounters pestilence, arrows, and destruction *as they live in the shadow of the Almighty*. We need the security of abiding in God *so that* we can brave the trials and struggles of this life together.

So, take time in worship to create a sense of safety. Sing a comforting hymn;, take time to breathe and calm everyone’s collective nervous systems; give a little extra space for the passing of the peace; engage in guided meditation together. Do whatever will help your community feel *safe* together. Then, name the safety of living together in the shelter of God and call the community to bring that safety to others, to invite others to abide in God’s shelter, to bravely face the world knowing that our security comes from the God who rescues us.

### **PREACHING NOTES**

Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16

We live in love. That is the secret of our existence. We are surrounded by a love that is almost indescribable. It may not feel like it because we often feel disconnected from this love. We’re wandering in the wilderness. But remember wilderness for Jesus isn’t the wilderness we think of. We think of green trees so thick you can’t see through, of grass and weeds and undergrowth that catches our feet, making it hard to walk. We think of dark and secluded, damp and mossy, bugs that carry us off, they’re so big. We think of creeping things and slithering things, things with teeth and claws. Swamps and rotting vegetation, our wilderness, peopled with creatures of our imagination and film history, is different than his. His wilderness was a desert. It was rocks and sand, was sun beating down, sapping strength and life, it was dry, parched, sere. Exposed and vulnerable. So, Psalm 91 was a blessing. You who live in the shelter, who abide in the shadow. It was not hiding, it was relief. Relief from the blazing sun.

You who abide in shadow. Ahh, can you feel it? The cloud that covers the sun for a moment, and suddenly you can stand straighter, can run a little further, can open your eyes again and see what surrounds you. Relief. God’s love is a relief. Relief from the dry feeling of isolation and abandonment. Relief from the hearts parched from a lack of love that they can sense or receive. Residing in the cool

shadow of acceptance and security. Standing up straighter instead of bent over from the weight of emptiness. My refuge and my fortress; my God in whom I trust.

For what? Trust God for what? There is a thread in this psalm that feels ... dangerous. Angels will bear you up so you won't dash your foot on a stone? Treading on lions and snakes? No scourge will come near your tent? Dangerous, and conditional: Those who love me I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. What about those who don't know, because they haven't been told or haven't been told in a way that makes sense to them? What about those who don't know how to love You yet? Are they, are we just on our own if we find ourselves in that category, temporarily or permanently?

And if we do know, if we do love as best we can, then what do we get? A bubble suit? A tireless guardian angel, pulling us back from busy curbs, protecting us from airborne diseases, shielding us from flying projectiles hurled by accident or intent? Are we impervious to hurt? If that is the promise, then why do we hurt? Because You aren't paying attention or because we didn't love rightly? We didn't know enough?

We know better. In our heads anyway. Sometimes our guts wonder. We feel abandoned at times. At other times we feel inadequate, like we disappointed God. But we know better. We know that God's love is constant and unconditional. And Psalm 91 simply says there is nothing that can happen to us to take it away. The last two verses explain the promises.

"When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them." Verse fifteen says God promises to answer whenever we call. We don't always hear the answer because we've moved out of hearing distance, or because we haven't learned the language of God well enough, or because we've set up a hoop for God to jump through and God hates hoops. But the promise is God will always answer.

The second promise from this verse is that God will be with us. "I will be with them in trouble." We'd prefer God keep us from trouble, but since a lot of the trouble we're in is our own fault and God gives us the freedom to wander away, we should celebrate the good news that even our stubbornness, even our bad choices, even our attempting to take God's place doesn't keep God from being with us.

But wait, that verse does say rescue! "I will rescue them, and honor them." So, there you go! Our get out of jail free card!! Except, it doesn't seem to work that way. God will honor us? By allowing us to make our own choices and then to live with the consequences. That's honoring us. But we do have that card in the end. We are rescued. Verse sixteen says "with long life I will satisfy them and show them my salvation." What could be longer than eternity? That's the promise. That's the rescue. We want something more temporal, usually, but God thinks big picture. And tries to show it to us. Invites us to live it now. Another way of thinking about this protection is to say let's live like God wants us to and see if our lives aren't better, more full, more alive. Let's love like God encourages us to and see if we aren't better lovers all around.

## **LITURGICAL RESOURCES**

### **Call to Worship**

We gather today to worship God, who listens when we call.

**We gather to rest in the shadow of God's wings.**

We gather to pray to God, who answers us when we call.

**We gather to lift our voices in the shadow of God's wings.**

We gather to praise God, who rescues us when we call.

**We gather to rejoice in the shadow of God's wings.**

Beloved, come! Let us worship God, who covers and delivers us in Love.

**We gather to worship in the shadow of God's wings.**

*Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, April 2025.*

### **Opening Prayer**

Eternal God, the refuge and help of all your children,  
we praise you for all you have given us,  
for all you have done for us,  
for all that you are to us.

In our weakness, you are strength,  
in our darkness, you are light,  
in our sorrow, you are comfort and peace.

We cannot number your blessings,  
we cannot declare your love:

For all your blessings, we bless you.

May we live as in your presence,  
and love the things that you love,  
and serve you in our daily lives;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Written by St. Boniface (ca. 672-754). Posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2014/06/prayer-of-saint-boniface.html>.*

### **Prayer of Confession**

Search us, O God, and know our hearts.

Test us and know our anxious thoughts.

Point out anything in us that offends You,  
and guide us on the road to life.

(Time of silence, or appropriate song)

**O Lord, You have examined our hearts  
and know everything about us.**

**You know when we sit down or stand up.**

**You know our thoughts from afar.**

**You see when we walk or lie down,**

**You know every detail of our conduct.**

**You even know what we are going to say before we say it.**

**Such knowledge is too wonderful for us,  
too great for us to understand.**

**Cleanse us from hidden faults.**

**Keep us from deliberate sins.**

**Don't let them control us.**

**Then we will be free of guilt,  
and innocent of serious wrongdoing.**

Listen to the promise of God:

*Those who love Me, I will deliver.*

*I will protect those who know My name.*

*When they call to Me, I will answer them;*

*I will be with them in trouble.*

*I will rescue them and honor them,  
and show them my saving power.*

**Lord, we trust in Your unfailing love!**

**We rejoice because You have rescued us!**

**Amen.**

*Adapted from the re:Worship blog, <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2011/07/litany-of-confession.html>.*

### **Benediction**

Receive again the promises of God:

“Because you cling to me, I will deliver you;

I will protect you because you acknowledge my name.

You shall call upon me, and I will answer you.

I will be with you in times of trouble;

I will deliver you and glorify you

and will show you my salvation.”

Go from here with peace and confidence,

knowing that God goes with you.

*Posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/02/benediction-psalm-91-14-15.html>.*