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Osler Mennonite Church

Call to Refuge:

1 Samuel 3:1-10; Psalm 62:5-12; John 1:43-50

Hello Everybody,

As many of you already know, this past week Matt and I completed a move into a new rental in Saskatoon. This has meant our January has been filled with packing, unpacking, moving furniture and sorting our bookshelves. Luckily for us, we have relatively few possessions and this is our fifth move since getting married three years ago, so we have a pretty efficient system. However, last Sunday night, after a weekend of moving and only a few more boxes to go through, I was wide awake from 1am to 5am, unable to rest because of the unfinished work that was left in those unpacked boxes in the living room.

It occurred to me that this inability to rest amidst the incompleteness of transitioning between homes is a small piece of what I think many of us have been living through these past months. As COVID vaccines start to roll out in our province, lighting the horizon with hope for what is coming next, we can feel a future that will include opening up our province. The trouble is, with all the celebration that comes with slowing down the pandemic, our current context is that we are still in the transition, and not yet on the other side of it. Like the boxes in the living room. We are so grateful for the beginnings of what is to come, and yet we still carry with us the tensions and grief that remain present in a pandemic reality today. We want the release of everything being over, but are stuck in the in between, the not yet of our current circumstances.

In today's scripture, we read the words of Psalm 62, which speak of finding refuge in God, finding rest for our souls. We often think of rest and peace as something that comes at the end of busyness or stress. It is the relief at the end of the long day when we finally get to lie down and sleep, and it is only after a

stressful season wraps up that we are able to unwind with a vacation. But our Psalmist's reality is very different. Just a few verses preceding our selected scripture text, our Psalmist cries out **“How long will you besiege me as though I were a crumbling wall or a tottering fence?”** (vv.3). This Psalm is not a calming lullaby at the *end* of a long hard day; it is a song of declaring refuge in the *midst* of a long hard day. The calm and rest spoken about in these verses is not a calm brought from circumstances, but a peace that is chosen, claiming the love and peace that God offers us in the midst of the chaotic, heartbreaking challenge of everyday life.

This idea of peace amidst chaos is something easier to embrace in theory, but challenging to translate into our actual experience. In a year of overwhelming tension, it is hard to claim a feeling of refuge; a space where our soul finds rest. It is much easier to relate to the verse about the crumbling wall I mentioned earlier. The key to this paradox lies in our understanding of refuge. Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen writes extensively about the sacredness of life amidst a world of pain in her work in integrative medicine. She proclaims that **“Taking refuge does not mean hiding from life. It means finding a place of strength, the capacity to live the life we have been given with greater courage and sometimes with greater gratitude.”** Refuge is a gift that sustains us in the midst of the crumbling wall and the tottering fence. Our Psalmist names that God is the rock, the solid ground in an environment of tumult. Here with us in all of the anxiety and stress, God is present, longing for us to **“pour out our hearts before God our refuge”** (vv.8). God is wanting us to trust in the peace and deliverance that is available in this relationship with the Divine.

God does not put this gift of peace on hold until I've unpacked every last box in my kitchen, nor does it wait until the world “returns to normal.” This peace is received in the present moment, within the mess, because of a trust in God that

strengthens and sustains us, despite lament. A friend of mine likened it to when you are a child swimming in the river for the first time, panicked and trying to keep your head above water until an adult gently tells you can touch the bottom if you just stand up. And so, you put your feet down and stand up, and the water is still rushing past you, but you have found your solid ground and no longer need to be afraid.

One of the gifts of following a lectionary for our scripture readings is that it allows the different stories to influence one another and shift the perspective we read them with. Both our texts from Samuel and John tell the story of a call from God. Our Samuel text will be familiar to many of you: God's persistent call of young Samuel who, bless him, is devotedly pestering Eli with his commitment to obey his teacher, not realizing it is God calling to him. It actually has an interesting parallel to our gospel text, where we see Phillip eagerly going to fetch his friend Nathanael and bring him over to follow Jesus. Both individuals are called into relationship with God, but it is only made possible through the care of another person. Without Phillip and Eli, Nathanael and Samuel remain out of the loop.

The context we meet these people in is not neutral. Rather, they are full of political upheaval. When Samuel receives his call, his community is about to encounter a period of radical dislocation and, eventually, transformation. Nathanael is promised to witness miracles and events beyond what he can ever imagine in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. When reading the call narratives in the Bible it is natural to begin wondering about our own calling in this world, what God is leading us towards or away from. And here is where our lectionary magic kicks in, because beside these beautiful stories about companioning other people in their call to find God, we have Psalm 62. Our commentators on this text note that there is in fact a call in this Psalm as well. There is a call to decision. The repetition of the language of trust and heart in this

song call upon us to ask ourselves “Where do we set our heart today? What is peace and where do we seek to find it?”

It is a big call, to discover the refuge of God in the tumult of the world around us. We were never built to do this work alone. We need the nudges of Eli and Phillip. We need to be told to “**Go to sleep**” and “**Listen,**” we need to be invited repeatedly to “**Come and see**” when our doubt clouds our initial response. We also need to be able to step into the roll of Eli and Phillip for those around us, inviting them to answer the call to a place of refuge, where they can find rest and strength for a new day.

With this call in mind, I humbly ask *you* to enter into a practice of discovering again God’s refuge in today’s service. I invite you to join in a ritual of a breathing prayer with me. It is very simply, you need only to sit back and receive. I invite you to follow my voice and partake as you feel comfortable. You are also welcome to simply sit back and bear witness, making space for others to partake in seeking refuge if you are not in a space to receive it at this moment. And so, we begin...

Resources: New Interpreters Bible Commentary; Believers Church Bible Commentary; My Grandfathers Blessings by Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen; Sarah Bessy Field Notes “Breath Prayers for Anxious Times

Breathing Prayer *(Scripture Reference Adapted from Sarah Bessy)*

First, I invite you to fidget, move around, squirm a little, and then come to settle into a place that feels comfortable to you.

Now allow your eyes to find some rest, maybe you close your eyes, or focus on a item in front of you. Whatever gives your eyes permission to slow down and discover some calm. Once you have settled in, notice yourself breathing in and breathing out.

Then imagine a room or a place where you feel safe, your own sanctuary: it can be a real place or one that exists in your imagination. Imagine yourself in this space of refuge. Imagine the way the air smells and the way the light feels.

Breathe slowly and deeply while holding that place in your mind for a few moments, settling in. This is a place of refuge. This is where you are now, you and God, gathering you in as we breath through this scripture text.

(From Matthew 11:28-30)

***Inhale: Humble and gentle One,
Exhale: you are rest for my soul.***

(From 2 Cor. 12:9)

***Inhale: Your grace
Exhale: is enough for me.***

(From Psalm 23)

***Inhale: I will not be afraid
Exhale: for You are with me.***

(From Psalm 46:1)

***Inhale: You are our refuge
Exhale: and our strength.***

(From Psalm 74:16)

***Inhale: Both day and night
Exhale: belong to You.***

(From Psalm 91:1)

***Inhale: I find rest
Exhale: in Your shelter.***

Breathing In, Breathing Out. Imagine yourself slowly leaving that sanctuary, arriving back into your seat here in this worship service, at home or in a pew. As we return opening your eyes may, you know that this place of refuge remains with you still. Calling always for us to come, see, and listen, that we may know the Peace of God.