

## **Order of Worship**

Sunday, November 1, 2020

Rise: Meeting God with the Psalms of Ascent

All Saints' Day

### **GATHER**

#### **The Ringing of the Bell**

##### **Welcome & Announcements**

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! Welcome to worship with Joseph UMC. Whether this is your first time with us or one of our faithful participants, Welcome! We have a big day this time. First, daylight savings time has ended for this season. Did you remember to set your clocks back? With this format of worship precise timing isn't as critical, but it may be important in other parts of your life. It is also All Saints Day, a time when we honor those who have gone before us. We have a very special time of honoring many of the areas of loss in our lives this year while remembering the hope we have. Just a few announcements before we get started.

- Love Your Neighbor Campaign – In our newsletter this month, I included a sheet of these Love Your Neighbor cards for you to cut out and share around the community. Have you had an opportunity to try these out yet? It is an opportunity to physically demonstrate good will in our community and love our neighbors in a practical way while so many things seem so contentious these days. If you need a sheet of these to print out, you can click the link in the video description to our newsletter. It is the second to last page.
- Food Bank – Today, as the first Sunday of the month, we are collecting for the Food Bank. You are invited to bring your non-perishable items and paper products to the stairs on the north side of the church on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street any time today, Sunday, Nov 1, until 5 PM.
- And last but not least, next Sunday, Nov 8, we are having another Car Parade! This time we are visiting our friends in Enterprise and Wallowa. Meet at the church at 1 PM, and we will go from there. It was so much fun to see so many people the last time, you don't want to miss it.

But now, as we move into our worshipful time, I ask you to calm your mind. This year we will honor our saints and the losses in our lives in a new and special way that keeps all of what we have experienced in 2020 in mind. As we begin, I especially want to lift us Kerry Bolen, Sharon Sherlock, the father of Ann-Marie, and Sheila Russell as saints in our lives that we will especially miss. And now, I present Rev. Marcia McFee with a special remembrance this day.

#### **A Litany of Loss**

We gather, mindful of the losses that have multiplied throughout this year. As we look back at this year all at once, we are in danger of being overwhelmed by its tragedies. Sickness, violence, fire, hurricane, flood, earthquake and more.

Our aim in this moment is to simply acknowledge it, to mourn it, and to know that in all of this, there is a possibility of more light. If we are to be overwhelmed, let it be that we are overwhelmed with the assurance that we are not alone.

So, we will light four candles for prayer, for loss, and a fifth candle of hope.

Join in a litany of losses:

**We mourn the loss of life.** For so many the pandemic has taken loved ones. We mourn the loss of those close to us and those whose names we do not know. We mourn those who perished while working to save other lives. We mourn those who died not of pandemic but of other causes. And we mourn the loss in many cases of our ability to be with them as they passed. Our loss of gathering together for comfort in the ways we needed so much.

I invite you to repeat after me.

*We mourn this loss of life.*

*We honor and remember these Beloveds.*

*We pray for comfort and peace.*

*Amen.*

**We mourn the loss of livelihoods.** For so many the pandemic has taken the security of food, shelter, the care of families in medical care. We mourn the loss of businesses that could not withstand the circumstances. These were not just businesses but dreams born of passion and hard work. We mourn those who find themselves needing to rely on others for help when really they want is to be able to help others.

I invite you to repeat after me.

*We mourn this loss of livelihood.*

*We honor and remember dreams now deferred.*

*We pray for sustenance and resilience.*

*Amen.*

**We mourn the loss of love.** Our society's dilemma centuries in the making has created such hatred, suffering, oppression, and ill-will. We mourn the loss of those whose lives were lost to brutality and violence. We mourn the loss of our ability to love one another despite our differences, as beings who deserve to be seen for their inherent beauty and worth, each one a part of the beloved community. We mourn that black and brown people have perished and suffered in greater proportion in the pandemic of corona virus. We

mourn the pandemic of racism that still plagues the fabric of the communities of our nation.

I invite you to repeat after me.

*We mourn the loss of love.*

*We honor and remember the work of prophets who proclaim justice.*

*We pray for compassion and change.*

*Amen.*

**We mourn the loss of liveliness.** For so many, this year has robbed us of our energy, our enthusiasm, and our sense of well-being. We mourn teachers, leaders, care-givers, and workers who are struggling to help those in their care. Themselves exhausted and needing the sustenance that they give to others.

We mourn the loss of all those who are suffering with anxiety and depression who are finding it difficult to live each day with fullness or find hope for tomorrow. We mourn those who we have lost to suicide. We mourn those who find themselves addicted to substances in order to ease the pain that feels unbearable. We mourn those who are experiencing their places of shelter as an abusive place that they struggle to escape.

I invite you to repeat after me.

*We mourn the loss of liveliness.*

*We honor and remember that each person is precious and whole.*

*We pray for recovery and renewed vigor.*

*Amen.*

**And now we light the fifth candle,** just as we will do this year on Christmas Eve. We light this as a sign of our belief. *We believe in the light that has come and is coming.*

This light casts its glow on all the surrounding prayers we have prayed. This light resides within us and perhaps dim for a time but always lit, an ember of the Holy inside us. This light reminds us that we are not alone. Christ is with us. Amen.

Now, I invite you to sing our opening hymn, “For All the Saints,” and I haven’t done this since we have been worshiping remotely, but today, I will ask you to stand as you sing, “For All the Saints.”

**\* Opening Hymn**

"For All the Saints" – UMH #711 (Stand)

## PROCLAIM

### Scripture

Psalms 121

### Sermon

*Rise: Meeting God in the Psalms of Ascent*  
*From Where Does My Help Come?*

We are in our second week of our series, *Rise: Meeting God with the Psalms of Ascent*. We are using these Psalms as a pathway to connect with God for the renewal that we need at this point in the history of the world, unprecedented in our lifetimes. Last week we learned that the Psalms of Ascent are 15 short psalms (Psalms 120-134) that the Israelites would sing/say on their way to festivals in Jerusalem. The Israelites were on a physical pilgrimage to encounter God. We are on a spiritual pilgrimage. This is something that we desperately need after seven and a half months of living in the world of pandemic and all of the other things that have mushroomed as a result of the emotional distress in trying to preserve physical health, both of our friends, family, and neighbors as well as ourselves. We are tired. It almost feels like we are living in exile, separated from feeling of normalcy.

That idea of exile is another connection with the creation and use of these Psalms of Ascent. That was as the Jewish people were returning from the Babylonian Exile. We saw a bit of that with last week's text, Psalm 120. "5 Woe to me that I dwell in Meshek, that I live among the tents of Kedar!" We talk about not necessarily being ones physically living in foreign lands, but feeling like you are surrounded by people who are not like you, don't share the same culture or priorities of what is important, and in the most extreme cases, people who feel like enemies. However, during the Babylonian Exile, this was the literal circumstance of the Jewish people. They could not worship in the Temple. They could not worship the way they always had, the way that they had encountered God. Sound familiar? Psalm 137 talks about that time. Is Psalm 137 one of the Psalms of Ascent? No. I am going to paraphrase based on a song that was popular in the 1970s. It did stay very faithful to the text:

*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down*  
*Yeah we wept, when we remembered Zion*

*When the wicked*  
*Carried us away in captivity*  
*Required from us a song*  
*Now how shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?*

But then the day came when King Cyrus the Great allowed the return of Jewish people to Jerusalem. Tradition holds that these psalms were sung as people returned. Last week, people longing to return to their home because they are tired. Are you tired? Do you feel tired? Do you

feel like you have been in exile? The circumstances of these psalms so closely mirror our current situation, they can provide a pathway for us to return to God as well.

This week's psalm is our next step in the journey our pilgrimage from exile, Psalm 121. This is one of my favorite passages in the Bible. It provides the inspiration for the imagery for this series. Hear the Word of the Lord!

- 1 I lift up my eyes to the hills—  
where does my help come from?*
- 2 My help comes from the Lord,  
the Maker of heaven and earth.*
- 3 He will not let your foot slip—  
he who watches over you will not slumber;*
- 4 indeed, he who watches over Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.*
- 5 The Lord watches over you—  
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;*
- 6 the sun will not harm you by day,  
nor the moon by night.*
- 7 The Lord will keep you from all harm—  
he will watch over your life;*
- 8 the Lord will watch over your coming and going  
both now and forevermore.*

**The Word of Life!**

**Thanks be to God!**

Last week we had the lament of being surrounded by enemies. This week we can hear it as someone who is about to embark on a long journey. It can be the physical journey like the long journey, on foot of course, from Babylon, as you can see here. Or, it can be the spiritual journey that we take throughout our lives. With detours and meanderings along the way. 2020 could certainly be described that way, whether it is a detour, meandering, or something else, I'm not quite sure.

We look to the hills or our mountains right now, and we might see them as a source of comfort, even our reminder of the Lord, creator of heaven and earth. We can see the beauty and delight in the grandeur, this reminder of the awesome power of God. This is the kind of way that I always perceived the opening verse of Psalm 121. "I lift my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from?" And yet, there is also a wildness there. As we look at this picture of our mountains, it is a statistical certainty that there are some dangerous predators in there that we can't necessarily

perceive in the picture itself. My husband, Rod, was hiking up there with our dog, and they encountered a bear. Yes, the bear climbed a tree, but that didn't have to be the case. Bears are probably getting ready for their long winter's nap if they have not already done that, but still despite the beauty there is still danger there.

If we are talking about the Middle East at that time, in unpopulated areas, mountains certainly meant danger if not wild predators, it could mean bandits or robbers. So, contemplating a long journey, I might lift up my to the hills, I may do it in fear, concerned about the danger I'm about to encounter. Alternatively, it could also be a place of safety and refuge. Heading for the hills. From the crest, you can scan for danger for a long way. Then, the crest can also be the place over which help arrives. I think of Gandalf appearing at the crest of the hill in the Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers with the cavalry when all hope was lost.

And that's the reminder in this psalm. Regardless of what you feel when you look to the hills, relief, awe, beauty, danger, or in desperation about what you are having to face here in the valley on any given day, the next verse is your reminder. Your help comes from the Lord. Who is the Lord? The maker of heaven and earth. That phrase, Maker of heaven and earth, only occurs five times in the Old Testament. All of them in the psalms, three of them in the Psalms of Ascent (here, psalm 124:8 and 134:3). (*Stepping Up*, pg 23) A reminder of who we are actually talking about here.

All of these circumstances are instances when we might call upon this psalm to remind ourselves that God is there, and it's THIS God that neither sleeps nor slumbers. In some ancient traditions, the gods did sleep or hibernate during parts of the year. Our God is watching out for us all the time. For me this psalm is one that I can go to when I am in distress, or even if I feel like I am about to become overwhelmed. I can say the first couple of verses, and I can relax. "1 I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? 2 My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth." (Psalm 121:1-2) I remember who God is and who I am, God's beloved child. My prayer for you is that you could receive that kind of comfort when reciting those verses.

That has been one of my challenges to you this month, to read over the Psalms of Ascent. One time through at least, but three times through is better. And, if you would like to have them as your refuge and strength, an ever-present help in time of need, read them every day. Incidentally, that line comes from Psalm 46:1 where it describes God.

If we could only remember how much God is on our side, but in our brokenness and frailty we forget, or at least I forget, even as I try to encourage others. While God is on our side ... and I don't mean that God is "on our side" as opposed to "their side." But, rather God desires us to be successful in our walk with him. God wants us as the church to spread his love in the world

through 1) telling people/teaching people about that love; 2) demonstrating that love by helping the hungry, helping people in need by attending to their emotional needs and yes, their spiritual needs. To put it is a more poetic and biblical way, to give light to those who sit in darkness. (c.f. Matthew 5:14-15, Luke 1:79)

God is on our side to successfully build a life, to be a person, to be a church that reflects God's love and glory. God is promising protection, but that is not always going to be comfortable, and yes, we're back in 2020. Again and again the Bible shows God protecting people in the midst of their discomfort and challenging situations. Thinking of the Babylonian Exile specifically, I am reminded of Daniel and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They were still captives in the Babylonian court. They were forced to work for their captors. They did their work well, but people still plotted against them. They were faithful to the Lord, but they still suffered from captivity. They were most likely among those who went down to the Rivers of Babylon and wept as they remembered life in Judah in Zion. Did they have to live through adversity? You bet. And yet, God also watched over them during this challenging time. Daniel was thrown into the lions' den. He survived. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace that killed the guards that brought them, but they survived. (c.f. Daniel 1:3-7, 6:1-28, 3:1-30)

In our own time, it's hard to persevere. It's hard to understand the why. Josh Moody gives a great example of how hurting can turn into healing: Think of the surgeon prepping to go into surgery. As he or she prepares, they know in one sense that they are about to do the patient harm. They will cut open the body and use the surgical tools. "The patient will bleed. ... That sounds evil. Yet that surgeon rightly believes that he is following the Hippocratic Oath to 'do no harm.' Harm is not harm when it does good. That is what I think the psalm must be saying. Yes, this may hurt. That is why you are asking for help. Look at the hills, but do not stop there. Go beyond them. Look to the God who made the mountains, who made everything" (Josh Moody, *Journey to Joy: The Psalms of Ascent* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013], 36–37, Kindle).

As we use social distancing and mask wearing to protect our community in the pandemic, we hear about people suffering from the isolation, suffering in so many ways, economically for many. I imagine for extroverted people it is especially hard, but even introverts need to see and interact with people. We make the sacrifice. For ourselves? Well, somewhat, but the primary purpose is to protect others in our community. That should also help us as individuals. It is really to help others. But why do we do it, when it is obviously harmful in some ways to everyone? Because saving their life or their physical health is the greater good. So, what do we do? When it was for the short term, a few weeks, it is suck it up. You can handle anything for three weeks, but after all of that time, we need a better answer than that. We try to mitigate the negatives, the harms in other ways.

All of this is precisely the reason that we as Joseph UMC are not gathering for worship in person right now, despite all the hardship ... especially when corona cases are going up sharply all over the country and even here. The actual number may be relatively small compared with Portland or Boise, but for here 11 new cases in 5 days is significant. And yet, we as social creatures that are linked spiritually, we need to address our need for connection. We need to figure out how we remain the church for our community. One thing that we're doing is putting together UMCOR style hygiene kits for our neighbors in Idaho who are being hit much harder with spikes in corona virus than here. People will be assembling kits at home, but what else *can we do*? It is like the benediction we do every week. Do all the good you *can*. What we can with what we have.

With this in mind over the next week or two I am inviting you to participate in small group discussions to brainstorm how we keep our connection vibrant during this time, and how we continue to be the church for our community. Ingrid Cook has organized some groups, and we are going to have people meet by video conferencing on Zoom. We can also organize conference calls. We will consider some questions to help us think about creatively supporting each other spiritually. What are we learning in this experience, this journey, this exile from what we considered normal? How do we step up to meet God in this moment of history in our lives?

Because that's what we do to renew ourselves in this marathon. We look to God, and we work with the people and the tools that God gives us to support each other and to continue to be a light in the world. Glory to God!

Amen!

As we go into our prayer time, I have a very special song for you that it inspired by the words of Psalm 121 called "My Help."

**Song** "My Help"

### **RESPOND**

#### **Breaking Open our Hearts with Prayer**

##### **Prayer –**

We are living in exciting and interesting times. 2020 really has been incredible, but with Election Day coming this week, tensions were probably going to be pretty high right now no matter what. Many of us have already voted. Whether the candidate you prefer from presidential to the local level prevails or not. I pray that we all will continue to love our neighbors and rest assured in the knowledge that God will continue to be with us no matter what happens. Will you pray with me?

*Lord God Maker of Heaven and Earth, We acknowledge that You are our God and there is no other. We acknowledge Your control over all things. We confess that we are experiencing fear and anxiety, but you are greater than those things that come against us. We love You and we believe that what You say is true and can be depended upon. We repent of not loving You and people better. We seek Your forgiveness and wise counsel; not just for now... but for always. We pray for the upcoming 2020 Presidential Election and ask for peace, safety for all. We declare You are our peace. We seek Your will and not our own, knowing that all things work together for our good and Your Glory because we are called and loved by You. We declare that the government rests on Your shoulders. We put our trust in You alone. We pray for all the people in our country regardless of political party or no political party. We know that you show no favoritism. We pray for the leaders of our country at all levels of government. Please, guide them in the ways that lead to peace. But most of all, we pray Your will be done. We ask all these things in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, Savior, and Redeemer, through Your Holy Spirit.*

*Amen.*

**Lord's Prayer** (using "trespasses") UMH #895

Now, let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us by saying ... *Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Now, I invite you to listen as our Claudia Boswell plays "Blest Be the Tie that Binds."

**Special Music** "Blest Be the Tie That Binds" – Claudia Boswell

**Closing & Benediction**

Thank you for worshiping with us on this day. Know that you take the love of God with you wherever you go. Through this week and through your life know where your help comes from. Your help comes from the Lord, Maker of Heaven and Earth. God loves you, and there's nothing you can do about it! Until next time I invite you to:

Do all the good you can,  
By all the means you can,  
In all the ways you can,  
In all the places you can,  
At all the times you can,  
To all the people you can,  
As long as ever you can.

As we remember our pilgrim journey to go up to step up to God, please join me in singing  
“Marching to Zion.” Until next time. Go in peace. Amen!

**Closing Hymn**

“Marching to Zion” – UMH #733