

**Altavista Presbyterian Church
Rev. Eduardo Soto, Jr.**

**“The Bedrock of Life”
Mark 1:14-20
Psalm 62:5-12**

**Third Sunday after Epiphany
January 21, 2018**

Mark 1:14-20

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

Psalm 62:5-12

For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. *Selah*

Those of low estate are but a breath; those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath. Put no trust in extortion; set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, set not your heart on them. Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God, and that to you, O Lord, belongs steadfast love. For you will render to a man according to his work.

“The Bedrock of Life”

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. Friends, this is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

You’ve heard it said that patience is a virtue, and indeed it is. I have to remind myself of this every time I venture into grumpiness. We often think of patience as suffering through something, whether it be a boring lecture or a medical emergency. Images of patiently waiting for things to change is what this conjures up. The Scottish minister and hymn writer George Matheson once wrote, “We commonly associate patience with lying down. We think of it as the angel that guards the couch of the [ill or dying]. Yet there is a patience that I believe to be harder—the patience that can run. To lie down in the time of grief, to be quiet under the stroke of adverse fortune, implies a great strength; but I know of something that implies a strength greater still: it is the power to work under stress; to have a great weight at your heart and still run; to have a deep anguish in your spirit and still perform the daily tasks. It is a Christ-like thing!” Matheson closes with this charge. “The hardest thing is that most of us are called to exercise our patience, not in the sickbed but in the street. To wait is hard, to do it with good courage is harder!”¹

Likewise, King David challenges us today to consider the act of waiting on the Lord. In the Psalm we just read, David turns to himself and says “For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence.” What does it mean to wait on the Lord? Very often we hear phrases like “cast your cares on the Lord,” “let go and let God,” “in His time,” &c. There is nothing wrong with these affirmations and encouragements; however, if there is no theological or biblical foundation under those comments, then they, more often than not, come across at best as cliché and at worst as callus. So, what does it mean to wait on the Lord? Waiting on the Lord means we wait patiently, hopefully, and actively.

We wait patiently knowing that we are on borrowed time, so to speak. Our existence, our sustenance, and our worth all belong to God. Everything we have and all that we are is because of God. In Deuteronomy 10:14 we read, “Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it.” David, too, exclaims in the Twenty-Fourth Psalm, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.” We wait patiently because we must rely on God completely. If I could provide for myself spiritually, then I wouldn’t have need for patience, for at any time that pleased me I could make myself holy. But I can’t do that. None of us can. Therefore, we must have a patience with God, knowing that he works in his own time and not according to our agenda. Not only is our waiting patient, but it is also hopeful. We need not wait in dread. Because everything we have and all that we are is due to God, we know that he will care for his children. The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 8:28, “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” We wait on God in hopefulness because we know that his steadfast love is on our side and that those whom he calls, he will indeed justify.

And just as our waiting is hopeful, it is also active. On the surface this seems to go against what David says, for he includes that our waiting is in silence. Some might interpret this silence as one that is purely passive. That understanding sees waiting in silence as allowing whatever persecution or abuse to continue unchallenged because for them patience, in and of itself, is virtuous. I disagree with this interpretation. Too often this view has been used for subjugation rather than sanctification. A false understanding of waiting in silence encourages or covers up abuse and injustice in the name of Scripture. This is not what David teaches. He says to wait in silence for two reasons. First, we must silence all voices of doubt and temptation. We cannot allow the Devil to sit on our shoulder and speak deceit into the ear. We do not rush God nor do we question or challenge his will. And second, we cannot hear God’s call if we are constantly talking back. We wait in silence because that is how God oftentimes speaks to us. I wish that God would come to me in the midst of a burning bush, or speak to me through an animal, or visit me in some human visage. All of these God has done, but in I Kings 19, he spoke to Elijah through the sound of a low whisper, a still, small voice. I think that’s more like how God speaks to us. And we can’t hear that whisper if we are not silent. As I was saying earlier, while our waiting is in silence, it is also active. Silent does not imply idleness. Monks in the Middle Ages who took vows of silence did not sit in their chambers all day doing nothing. They continued in their work and worship of God. Our waiting, too, is full of activity—obeying God’s commands

and doing the Lord's work. We do so "silently" in order to perceive God's will through the Holy Spirit's directions.

Now, David moves on to tell us why we wait on the Lord. He says, "Soul, wait in silence for my hope is from God." We just established that everything we have comes from God. So, it should be no surprise that this includes our hope. Our hope is *in* God and our hope is *from* God. We wait on the Lord because from him will our hope come. How is it then that our hope comes from God? We often equate hope and patience, and in both uses we likely encourage one another to "have hope" to "not give up." Hope, like faith and many other things, is not something we can muster ourselves, rather it is something given to us by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we are given hope by God's Spirit because of who God is. And now David tells us who this God is in whom we place our hope and trust.

In this Psalm, David describes God with five "my" statements. The first is "God is my rock." In Matthew 7:24, Jesus says, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock." God, revealed through his Word, should be the solid bedrock of our entire being. Without God as our firm foundation, we have no hope of weathering even the slightest storm of the enemy. The second statement is "God is my salvation." Now this certainly points us to our eternal salvation, for surely without God's choosing us first we would be utterly ruined. But I think this is more than just the work of Christ on the cross. God as "my salvation" includes God's providential care. So not only is God the foundation for our life, he is also the roof over our heads. The next statement is "God is my fortress." This assertion naturally follows the last. If God is my salvation than that means he is also my protection. Now this does not mean we will never be assailed. As we know from church history and contemporary experience, the Body of Christ will be assaulted and accused. But the faithful in Christ, while they may not be protected physically, are protected spiritually by God and his angels. In this way we can boldly cry out with Martin Luther, "And do what they will / Hate, steal, hurt, or kill / Though all may be gone, / Our victory is won; / The kingdom's ours forever!"² Similar to "God is my fortress" is "God is my refuge." Psalm 46:1 calls God "our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Because God is our foundational bedrock, the roof that covers us, and the walls that protect us, we are able to turn to him in all things. God as "my refuge" not only means I can turn to him when I am in need, but also that I should turn to him for all things, whether they be needs, concerns, joys, or whatever. God is the person whom we can run to and find refuge and strength to carry on.

The fifth and final statement is "God is my glory." That is so important for us to remember in this day and age. We see all around us the glorification and even deification of the human self. This culture of selfish individuality arrogantly lifts up the single over and against the whole. Christian living is all about relationships. And not just anyway relationship, but rightly ordered relationships founded on the bedrock of the Gospel, in obedience to God's commands, and in service to our neighbors. In Philippians 4:13, the Apostle Paul boldly proclaims, "I can do all things *through him who strengthens me.*" The "him" he is talking about there is God. I have no doubt that Paul was likely thinking of these "God is my..." statements that dot the Psalms. If

God is my rock, my salvation, my fortress, and my refuge, then surely God and he alone is my glory. We cannot take full credit for our blessings. We, like Paul, have no room to boast. I am certainly proud of my achievements, and you should be as well, but we should never ever forget whence those achievements and blessings come. The Christian must always be outwardly focused on Christ and on neighbor, not selfishly inward. My glory, your glory, are not products of our own works, but of the steadfast love of God, in whom and on whom we build our life.

Since it is God who is the bedrock of life, the walls of protection, the roof of providential care, and the refuge to whom we turn, David quickly reminds us that it is in this God and he alone whom we place our trust. Many of you will likely handle this—money—either today or sometime during the week. You'll notice that all of our currency, whether coin or bill, has the phrase "In God We Trust." Now, we can debate the origins of that imprinting and we can debate its constitutionality, nevertheless, I fully believe having that on our money should be an apt reminder. And I think King David would agree. Verse nine reads, "Those of low estate are but a breath; those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath." Wealth, power, and poverty, when compared to the foundation that is God, are found lacking. They have no weight or worth when we consider God's mighty works. Far too often we place our trust in this, in money, and not in God. We expect wealth and riches to be our rock for retirement, our salvation in times of need, our fortress behind which we cower, our refuge to which we run, and our glory which we flaunt. We cannot put our trust in money. That does not mean we can't have it, that does not mean we shouldn't use it wisely. It does mean we cannot place our worth, our life's foundation, on material things. As Isaiah reminds us in chapter forty, "All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever." And Jesus, himself, commands us "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." I invite you, therefore, to build your life on God's eternal Word.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, Lord of all, you call us to wait on you. Far too often we try to rush you to fit our schedule, but you command us to follow your time. Open our hearts and minds to your heavenly patience and hope, knowing that your time is perfect time. You also command us to wait silently, yet we clutter the airwaves with contemptuous backtalk, blind noise, and useless bickering. Quiet the voices of doubt, fear, and temptation so that we may hear your still, small voice and respond to your will. Likewise, help us to build our life on your Word, which is your everlasting and perfect revelation. In Christ is our bedrock and abode, therefore we need to trust him, and he alone. Help us, we pray, as we endeavor to be his disciples and witnesses in and to this broken world. In Jesus' holy and precious name, we pray. Amen.

¹ *Our Daily Bread*, April 8

² *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*, stanza 4. https://hymnary.org/text/a_mighty_fortress_is_our_god_a_trusty_sh