

June 25, 2023

Psalm 91:1-4

“God’s Comfort for a Churning Stomach”

- I. It’s Been that Way for Some Time.
- II. And We Know the Reason.
- III. We Know the Shadow that Shelters

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Dear Friends in Christ,

The hymn, *Abide With Me*, was written by Scottish Anglican pastor, Henry Francis Lyte. References to the hymn and its author have been made here in the past. It was officially sung at Lyte's funeral in 1847.

Our text reads: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust (Ps.91:1,2).'" As I thought about those words, I thought about the intensification of violence and conflict of this world in just the past twenty-three years. I thought about much of the churches' desire is to present God as the One who changes with the times. I thought about what is on most minds, namely, the ***what's to come***. Every stanza of the hymn, *Abide With Me*, not only draws us to the plea for God to be with us in dying and death but also in the midst of this world's turbulence.

This morning we're receiving . . .

GOD'S COMFORT FOR A CHURNING STOMACH

I. It's Been that Way for Some Time.

I believe it's safe to say that *A Churning Stomach* has been the case throughout the history of the church. C.F.W Walther, the theologian after whom our seminary is named, wrote the following:

"According to our Lord's prophecies, the closer we draw to the end of all things, the greater will be the bodily and spiritual distress, especially among Christians. Increasingly, Christians will be hated, rejected, excluded, and forsaken by the world. They will be abandoned to misery and everywhere denied their right. One persecution and affliction after another will rise up against them...More false christs will arise. Trials and temptations to error and sin will grow and become more dangerous, so that, if possible, even the elect would be led astray. The pure Word of God and right worship will become rare.

"In the last time, even Christians will be exceedingly weak. For this reason Christ asks, 'Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth (Luke 18:8)?' (God Grant It, Daily Devotions from C.F.W. Walther, Concordia Publishing house, Saint Louis, 2006, p.448.)

So, you'll want to keep in mind that Walther wrote those words around 153 years ago. And with that these words stare at us: *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.* And that's exactly where we live...isn't it? We live in a valley mixed with good, mundane, bad, and death. Shadowy. Uncertain. Ever changing, yet still the same: good, mundane, bad, death. John Brug wrote, "The 'valley of the shadow of death' may also be translated 'the darkest valley.' This verse may also refer to all the dangers a Christian faces, not only death." (John Brug, Psalms I, People's Bible Commentary, CPH, p.113)

II. And We Know the Reason.

And we know the reason for this shadow: *The wages of sin*. It's been that way since the Garden. It will get worse. It will be that way until, as Scriptures say, "...the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God (I Thess. 4:16)." Then it's over! For good!!

Most everyone you talk to expresses concerns, anxieties, fears and the insanity of what's happening in the personal, national, and world scenes. Isn't it amazing how smoothly this world moves from one upheaval to another. It flows. Unfortunately, it's never smooth for the heart. *The valley of the*

shadow of death fits with Jesus' words, "people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken (Lk. 21:26)." No matter what kind of world man tries to create, no matter what kind of virtual fantasy, no matter what kind of Utopia, it will still be torn apart by sin and death.

The words given to Paul come to mind: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth (Rm. 1:18)." And then come the chilling words of consequences for a world that suppresses the truth: "Therefore God gave them up"; locks people into its suppressing the truth so it can't get out until they meet their eternal doom. Here are selected verses from Romans 1:18-32:

"Therefore God gave them up to the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies...

"For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions (gave them up to their immorality)...

"And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not be done (Rom. 1:24-28)."

When God gives a person or a people up it's over! There are no re-do's, no second chances.

III. We Know the Shadow that Shelters.

However, there is another shadow. We give our greatest praise and thanks that we know the shadow that shelters. And so, once again, verses 1 and 2 of our text:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust' (Ps. 91:1,2).

God is the shadow that covers and gives the help we need to travel this world. Again, His shadow is not a guarantee that we won't have troubles. On the contrary, God said through the Apostle Peter as we live in anticipation of Christ's return, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now (as we travel through this world) you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so your faith...may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed (I Pt. 1:6,7, NIV)."

We remember Jesus' words to the disciples, to His church - us: "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world. (Jn. 16:33)." He's talking about the tribulations from a world that wants Jesus permanently out of the way.

The shadow that covers us is the strength and assurance of God's love and presence we receive through Word and Sacrament. It's knowing that the blood of Christ has cleansed away our sin and guilt. Friends, we cannot afford to loose sight of this Word of God to us:

"I, I am He who comforts you; who are you that you are afraid of man who dies, of the son of man who is made like grass, and have forgotten the Lord, your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, and you fear continually all the day because of the wrath of the oppressor, when he sets himself to destroy? And where is the wrath of the oppressor? He who is bowed down shall speedily be released; he shall not die and go down into the pit, neither shall his bread be lacking. I am the Lord your God, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar - the Lord of hosts is his name. And I have put my words in your mouth and covered you with the shadow of my hand, establishing the heavens and laying the foundations of the earth, and say to Zion (His church), 'You are my people.'" Is. 51:12-16.

Here are verses three and four of our text from Psalm 91:

“For he (our Lord) will deliver you from the snare of the fowler (from the trap to catch a bird; in this case the fowler is Satan) and from deadly pestilence (death from disease - sin). He will cover you with his pinions (his wings-His blood), and under his wings you will find refuge (protection); his faithfulness is a shield and buckler (a small round shield used for close contact fighting against the old evil foe, Satan).

Do you remember Jesus' lament over Jerusalem? “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. The city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings (her pinions), and you were not willing (Mt. 23:37).” We are sinful and completely undeserving of God's love and eternal life, but the Scripture is clear: “...the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (I Jn. 1:7-9).”

The world wants no part of the Gospel; it creates its own through failing good works. The wings of Christ cover our sin. As John writes, “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered (by the blood of Jesus). Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity (Ps. 32:1,2a). You see, *Whoever believes has eternal life!* In Christ, God always **abides** with us and will comfort the churning stomach. We're covered.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott