

SERMON
“Whose Time Is It Anyway?”
Psalm 31:1-16
Sunday, May 7, 2023

Many years ago, while greeting parishioners after worship I noticed a child staring up at a large plaque that hung in the foyer of the church. The plaque was covered with names, and small American flags were mounted on either side of it. As soon as I had greeted the last person in line, I made my way over to the child and greeted him.

“Good morning, Pastor,” replied the child still focused on the plaque. Turning to me and pointing to the plaque he asked, “what is this?”

“Well, son, it’s a memorial to all the men and women who have died in the service.”

The child, without missing a beat, looked back at the plaque and then back me and asked, “Which one, the 9:00 or 11:00 service?”

Whether they died at the 9 o’clock service, the 11 o’clock service, or while in service to the military does not matter; what matters is how they entrusted their lives to the Lord.

In today’s psalm, because of who God had already shown himself to be, David is urgently and prayerfully pouring out his heart to God. Not only are his enemies causing him severe distress, his friends have turned their backs on him and walked away. He feels unwanted, forgotten, as well as physically and emotionally constricted. Listen once again to his words of lament from the 9th, 10th and 12th verses: *“My eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief. My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak. I am forgotten as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery.”* One can almost hear his tears falling from his eyes.

Right after the pain of these verses, however, David speaks words of great contrast; *“But I trust in you, LORD; I say, ‘You are my God.’ My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me. Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love.”* Biblical scholar and commentator William Barclay says of David’s words, *“Our psalmist now makes the only proper response to his state of misery: he entrusts his life to God.”* In God, and in God alone, David not only feels safe and secure, he trusts God’s caring and loving hands.

From the cross, we hear Jesus place his trust in the Lord. Using David’s words from our psalm for this morning Jesus, crying with a loud voice, says, *“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”* Luke 23:46 records that having said this; Jesus *“breathed his last.”* Jesus died entrusting his life to the Father. David ruled as king entrusting his life to the father. Acts 7:59 says that as Stephen was being stoned to death, he too prayed David’s prayer: *“receive my spirit.”*

One of the great stories of faith is the story of Ruby Bridges. On November 14, 1960 Ruby, then a six-year-old was escorted by federal marshals to an all-white public elementary school in New Orleans. Six years earlier, after decades of struggle, the NAACP had won a major legal victory in the Supreme Court. In *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court declared that the doctrine of separate but equal schools was unconstitutional. For years after the ruling, the South simply refused to integrate. Ruby became one of six New Orleans children chosen to desegregate the schools in the city. As an adult when recalling the first trip to her school for a PBS special Ruby Bridges said, *“They didn’t see a child. They saw change, and what they thought was being taken from them. They never saw a child.”*

American author and child psychologist Robert Coles once said of Ruby; *“Every day as she went to school, she had to pass through rows of adults screaming threats and insults at her. And every day as she went through those rows of screaming adults, protected by federal marshals, you could sometimes see her lips moving in prayer. She was praying for strength to endure the abuse, and she was praying to God to forgive the people yelling at her.”*

I find it amazing that a 6-year-old girl got what King David was getting at in the 31st Psalm. I find it amazing that she could comprehend the words of Christ from the cross? Presbyterian pastor Laird J. Stuart says of Ruby; *“She understood how to be receptive to God. She knew if she trusted in God and sought what God*

could give her, God would see her trust as a green light and God would come to her and come into her life with strength and grace.”

For the Christian, our only response can be to entrust our very being to God as Ruby entrusted hers to God. Like David we need to learn to rely solely upon the divine presence to rescue us from our vicious, plotting enemies and to continue to keep us safe. But far too often we would rather take matters into our own hands. We feel this in our bones most intensely when we’re in a crisis. As much as we want to believe in a God who will come to our rescue, there is still an uncertainty in our minds and thus, we’re tempted to take over the management of our lives ourselves. It’s like saying: *“Please God, leave me alone; I’d rather do it myself.”*

David writes however, *“My times are in your hands.”*

“It is a revealing confession,” says Homiletics. David knows that time is running out; that the sands of time are shifting and that therefore, he can’t simply bide his time, hoping it is only a matter of time when time will heal all his wounds. William Barclay says of his confession about time: *“that it is no different than entrusting his life to God.”* Throughout his life David learned to look to the Lord, not to himself nor to those who helped him become king. *“I lift up my eyes to the hills — from where will my help come?”* so begins Psalm 121. David answers his own question in the next verse: *“My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.”*

In our text, Psalm 31, David makes it clear that he’s in need of intervention. In verses 1-5, he uses expressions like *deliver me, rescue me, save me, guide me, and take me out of the net that is hidden for me.* Yes, this is a man who knows he’s on the razor’s edge, living on borrowed time. For the psalmist, as for many of us, it’s crunch time, and when we totally understand this, we want to know who is keeping track of our mortality: *“My times are in your hands.”*

Civilla Martin said it best in the lyrics to her classic hymn:

*“Why should I feel discouraged? Why should the shadows come?
Why should my heart be lonely and long for heaven and home,
When Jesus is my portion? My constant friend is he:
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me:
His eye is on the sparrow and I know he watches me.
I sing because I’m happy, I sing because I’m free,
for his eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me.”*

As a people of faith, we may not know what the future holds, but we do know who holds the future. It’s time, don’t you think to put ourselves as well as our time into his hands? After all, whose time is it anyway?