

Sermon: Finding Peace In the Chaos
Scripture: Psalm 56:2-13
Date: Sunday, February 4, 2018
Preacher: Rev. Becky Stephens Smithey

I'm sure no one here has ever dealt with stress, right? Of course, we all know that's not true. The only thing that might be true for some of us in here is that we haven't dealt with stress today! Somehow, it seems, stress has become as much a part of our lives as sleeping or breathing. You know that old saying, "nothing is certain in this world but death and taxes." I think it could probably be modified to go something like this, "nothing is certain in this world but death, and stress, and taxes!" And so that's really why we find ourselves in the midst of the sermon series we have been doing, "Hanging In There When the World is Pulling You Down." Because all of us deal with stress at some point in our lives, and if it's not stress then it's worry or anxiety. Sometimes that stress and worry and anxiety can become so severe that it actually affects our well-being; we have anxiety attacks, or we stop eating or sleeping or exercising the way we should. So we continue this week what we started a few weeks ago, looking at God's wisdom for getting our lives in balance and living healthier, happier lives! Now, I will tell you, this is not a deep sermon, you probably won't get anything profound today, but sometimes we just need a simple reminder of the truths about the God who loves us and wants good things for us.

As we think about worry, stress, and anxiety this morning, I think it's important to acknowledge right off the bat that at least some degree of worry and stress is good. There's even a scientific name for it, "eu-stress." This is the kind of stress or worry that causes us to move out of the road when a car is coming, or to run when a lion is chasing us. Eustress can even be the motivation that drives us to take care of ourselves and our families. But as we all know, stress, like so many other things, can go too far and become a very horrible thing in our lives.

When I entered college, I was an Early Education major with Licensure. Two years into my degree, I felt strongly enough about being called to be a pastor that I switched my major to Religion with a Child Development Psychology minor. This change was going to extend my college education quite a bit.

I remember talking to a friend one day, and she said, "Something's bothering you. What's going on? I said quite simply, "I'm really stressed." We ended up spending quite a long time talking about what was stressing me out and how I could handle it better. The main thing I remember from that conversation was Carol suggesting that each night before I go to bed, I write down everything that I needed to accomplish the next day, then I wouldn't lose sleep worrying about those things and the possibility of forgetting something. I didn't ever do that, but I did learn something through our conversation that day. I learned that stress is something I have to control, not something that I can allow to control me.

Now, that was certainly an important lesson for me to learn. But there's an even more important lesson for us today, one that we know but that I think we often forget, probably because we are so stressed out. It's a lesson that comes from the Bible, over, and over, and over again. God says, "I am with you." The Biblical solution for worry and stress is not "To-Do" lists or life

coaches; instead, it's a God who's always with us. The Bible says at least 100 times, "Do not be afraid." Jesus himself says that to the disciples 25 times, far more than the eight times he says the great commandment to love God and neighbor! We don't have to be afraid; we don't have to be stressed or worried because God is with us. "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Now, don't misunderstand the message here: God is not saying that our lives will be worry or stress-free. The message is not even that God will take care of our problems, but rather that he will be with us and help us. No matter what happens in life, God will hold our hands, take even the toughest things, and somehow through his amazing work, he will redeem them and make something good.

We heard a reading from Psalm 56. This Psalm was written by David before he was king. He had been anointed and named as the future king, but he wasn't there yet, and now King Saul had gotten word of young David, the future King. Now, like so many powerful kings Saul didn't want any rivals to the throne, and he goes after David. He even puts a price on David's head. As you can imagine, David has to get out of there, he has to flee, and he ends up exiled in the land of his enemies, the Philistines. So now, David is surrounded on all sides by enemies. He's there in the midst of the Philistines every day, but he can't leave because then he would essentially be walking right into Saul's hands. We can only imagine the worry that plagued David during this time. I think it would be fair to say that David was stressed-out. And so what does David do? He asks God for help.

How many times have we called on God when we were stressed out? Probably not enough, especially when we consider how many times God promises to be with us! David knew that promise though, he knew it well. In Psalm 55, David says, "Cast your burden on the Lord and he will sustain you." I wonder if David knew when he wrote that Psalm just how close trouble was for him? It's never so easy to say and believe such things when you find yourself in the midst of great stress. Yet, even with a price on his head, even exiled in the land of his enemies, David knew what he needed to do; he knew how to handle the problem. And the solution was to call on the God who promised always to be with him and to sustain him through even the greatest trials.

You know, you are here this morning because we believe in a power greater than ourselves. We believe in a God who sent his own son to die for us so that we wouldn't have to! And yet, we so often insist on that we have to have all the power. We have to be the ones to do things and do them right. We have to be the ones to bear the burden of the latest work project or family crisis. But part of believing in this God who is so much more powerful than us is having the faith to turn our burdens over to him when things get too tough, when we get too stressed. Part of following this God is having faith that indeed never leaves us or forsakes us, even when everything in our lives is going wrong. And the promise of the Bible is that if we can have the faith to trust that God is with us and to share our greatest burdens with him, then we will know peace that would not otherwise be possible; a peace so complete it cannot be explained, and peace so wonderful it passes all understanding.

Doesn't that sound amazing? I don't know about you, but I want that kind of peace. I don't want to have to be terribly stressed and worried all the time. I want to know that when things really get tough, there's a place I can go for help, my God, who I can call on for help. I think David knew such peace, even there in Philistine, surrounded by his enemies. That's why David

says over and over again that he worships and praises God; that he will bring offerings of thanksgiving because he trusts in God who has saved his feet from stumbling, and even saved him from death. Why be anxious? With God's presence in your life, what can anyone do to you?

God is with you. God will sustain you, and he will never let you go. We will all face struggles, worries, and stress, but as often as those things burden our lives, we have to take them to the Lord. I have a friend that has a prayer box. When she has a burden too big to handle on her own, she writes it on a piece of paper and puts it in that box. It's something we all should do, either with a box, or a journal, or some simple knee-time, we must share our burdens with God. Our prayers may not always be answered in the way we want, so like Jesus, we have to say "thy will be done." But if we can do that, and trust a God who loves us beyond measure, then we will find peace in the midst of chaos, peace that passes all understanding.

There's an old hymn I think many of you will find familiar. Part of it goes like this: "Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed, for I am thy God and will still give thee aid; I'll strengthen and help thee, and cause thee to stand upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand. The soul that on Jesus still leans for repose, I will not, I will not desert to its foes; that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake."

This is God's word to us from beginning to end. He will never forsake us. It is that promise that enabled David to say, "No matter what I face, I will put my trust in you." And it is that promise that will give us the strength we need to face anything. Anything.