

From the Rising of the Sun

Psalm 62:5-12 and Mark 1:14-20

January 21, 2024

Grace Rogers, Howard and Mary Martin Ministry Intern
Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington, DC

What is the first thing you think about when you wake up in the morning? As for me, I am not a morning person, so its usually something along the lines of do I *really* have to be awake yet. When I was in high school, I would set an alarm every morning for 10 minutes before the absolute latest time I could leave the house without being late for my first class. My dad did not know, realize, or maybe care about my plans to optimize my sleep by brushing my hair and putting on my makeup at stop signs on my drive to school, so every morning he would knock on my door and wake me up about 45 minutes before my alarm was set to go off. And every morning I would lay in bed and my first thought of the day would be the mental gymnastics of figuring out how long I could actually stay in bed before I was A. late for school or B. my dad realized that I was not actually up and out of bed.

Now my mornings consist of a running checklist with my morning routine and the time table of everything I want to accomplish before my first meeting or class. I am sure the same is true for most if not all of you. At least for me, the morning is one of the most chaotic parts of my day filled with a plethora of things to do ping-ponging around my brain. That is why when I read one of The Guardian's proposed "tiny changes to transform your life," I laughed. "Consciously choose your first and last thought each day." That's funny. Consciously? I'm sorry for at least the first 20 minutes of my day I debate whether I even am conscious until I have completed my first cup of coffee.

Then I read our Psalm for today, and The Guardian's suggestion in light of our faith began to make more sense.

For God alone my soul waits in silence,

For my hope is from him.

He alone is my rock and salvation,

My fortress; I will not be shaken.

What would it look like if every morning we woke up and chose to proclaim that truth? My hope is from God, and because God is the fortress of my life, I will not be shaken. No matter what the day throws at me, my hope is not fragile. It will not be defeated.

Biblical scholar, Lamar Williamson describes Psalm 62 as a "sustained declaration of trust in God."¹ He also breaks the Psalm up into a few sections: Verses 5-7 speak of the psalmist's individual relationship with God in which the writer is declaring their individual trust in the steadfast love of God. Then, verses 8-10 move to an "exhortation to the congregation to put their trust in God rather than mere human beings or in violent attempts to make life secure."² The final section of the psalm, verses 11-12 "gives the reason for [the psalmist's] trust [in God] by reporting the revelation of statements about God's character and way" in the world.³ Overall, Psalm 62 is doing a lot but it is also pretty unique from other Psalms because it is neither a praise or lament. Instead, it is a declaration.

Let's use Williamson's divisions to take a deeper look at this Psalm and explore the ways it is calling us to be Transformed. Let's start with verses 5-7:

For God alone my soul waits in silence,

for my hope is from him.

He alone is my rock and my salvation,

¹ Williamson, *Interpretation: Mark*, 215.

² Williamson, 215.

³ Williamson, 215.

*my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
On God rests my deliverance and my honor;
my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.*

Williamson makes an interesting note in his commentary about the Hebrew used in this section. The Hebrew word that we often translate as “silence” in verse 5 is *dāmam* (daman), and it is difficult to translate. To translate daman to silence invokes an audible silence, but that is not what is meant. Instead, damam refers to a “quietness of the soul, an inner stillness that comes with yielding all fears and anxieties and insecurities to God in an act of trust”⁴ When we make this proclamation of trust in God, we are not settling the chaos of life. If we were to make this proclamation our first thought of the day, the kids aren’t going to stop screaming, the dog’s not going to barking, and your alarm isn’t going to fall silent. There is no promise that the exterior chaos will fade away, but when we put our trust beyond ourselves, in something bigger than our own lives, that inner chaos of thoughts ping-ponging around our brains, that is what is transformed. We are able to rest in an assurance of the peace that surpasses all understanding.

Don’t get me wrong. It would be complete and utter hypocrisy for me to sit here and say I’ve mastered this. I haven’t at all. These “small” changes from The Guardian’s article may seem small, but they are not always easy, and they take practice. This psalm “speaks of a trust [in God] that is present now in the gift of salvation [or life] but it must be maintained in life as an act of hope.” This psalm is an example of what we Methodists understand as God’s justifying grace. God is always, without a doubt, there for us to put our trust in, **and we must** practice putting our trust in God as an act of hope that God will continue to be steadfast as God has been since the dawn of time. We have to train ourselves to focus our thoughts on what is important.

The psalmist’s descriptions of God in verses 5-7 are also rooted in the rich history of Israel. God as the rock, salvation, and fortress “are traditional attributes of God that Israel came to know through its history with YHWH. [These predicates] belong to the community’s confession of faith.”⁵ As we move to the next section of the psalm, we see that the psalmist does not make this declaration individually, but in community alongside the host of believers who came before them, who would come after them, and alongside the believers of their time.

What if we woke up every day and proclaimed alongside the communion of saints and believers throughout time that God is my rock, salvation, fortress, honor, and refuge. And better yet, what if we actually believed it? What if in the uncertainty of life, in the disappointments of our days, when institutions fail us or people let us down, we are able to have stubborn hope because God is our rock, salvation, fortress, honor, and refuge.

Better yet, what if at the end of every day no matter what has happened or has not happened, we continue to have the audacity to proclaim that truth with hope that tomorrow will be better? How then might we be transformed?

While this is not included in our reading for today, in verses 3 and 4, the psalmist speaks of the hardship they are experiencing and the trials they are facing. In the midst of their hardship, the psalmist still boldly proclaims trust in God’s perennial presence and love.

This is hard. To trust God? At all times? With everything? But what about our control? What about our work and our deeds? What about our future? Our 401K? Our raise? Our kids’ college funds or our own debt? Or next career move? What about the things we can control and the things we cannot? We don’t want to give them up. I don’t want to give them up, but “The psalmist...is clear: Trust in God at

⁴ Williamson, 216.

⁵ Williamson, 216.

all times...[even though] the alternative seems so much more concrete and compelling: [to] trust your own resources, trust your own buying power, trust whatever you can get your hands on”⁶

I am in a phase of life where a lot of acquaintances and friends from high school are starting to have kids. Something I have noticed in the pictures of their newborns is that the children are almost always making a fist in those first days. One of the earliest skills that is developed in newborns is the ability to grasp. In fact, “newborns have an innate ability to grasp objects”⁷ at birth even though it takes a while to develop the coordination to pick things up. We come into this world grasping at air. Trying to hold on to everything we can. As we get older, our hands may no longer be in constant fists, but we are stilling trying to hold on, to maintain control by any means necessary.

Our human societies are full of hostility and deceit with everyone doing whatever they can to get ahead, ignoring the humanity of their beloved neighbors. And psalm 62 brings us face to face with the question of “what is true power and who are the truly powerful?”⁸ We are given a choice: to live by putting our trust in God or to live as though our “only plan were the destruction of other people” for the sake of our own gain. Friends, I usually wouldn’t say this, but there’s one correct choice. We are not called to live in a scarcity mindset, looking out only for ourselves. We are called to live in trust of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer who calls each and every person beloved. In this lifetime, it does not matter if you climb the corporate ladder, or own land, or build your dream house. Every material thing we get in this lifetime is “but a breath.” I hate to say it but that control we are grasping onto, is a “delusion.” True power is not holding on, but it is learning to let go. “To seek the peace of God will be to experience ‘power...made perfect in weakness’ (2 Cor. 12:19 NRSV).”⁹

That is where our reading from Mark enters the scene. The calling the psalmist gives to the congregation in Psalm 62 mirrors Jesus’ calling to the disciples to follow him in Mark 1:14-15. In doing my research for this sermon, I couldn’t help but wonder what the morning looked like for Simon and Andrew or James and John. Were they rushing around collecting their fishing gear and giving instructions to their workers to prepare for the work ahead of them. Surely, there is no way they could have foreseen that God incarnate would call them from their boats later that day. Yet, something in their lives had prepared them to be ready for God to interrupt their lives. When we intentionally put our trust in God, we are more attuned to the ways God may interrupt our schedules.

When Jesus calls the disciples, he is calling them to drop all of their responsibilities. The New Interpreters Bible Commentary notes that the disciples would have dropped both occupation and family obligation to follow Jesus. This would not have been a small task either because given the context clues of the passage we can conclude that these disciples would have been prosperous enough to own a house and employ hired hands for their work as fisherman. People relied on them, and when Jesus called, they left. In any society, such a break with family and occupation is extraordinary. The work of LORD in our lives is an extraordinary interruption. But, the disciples seemed to have an understanding that we need to learn from: they carried out their work with a primary awareness of God’s claim upon them and upon their world. What would it look like if we did the same?

What would it look like if we woke up every day and first proclaimed the truth that our trust is in the Lord, and then because our trust is in God everything we do and every living thing belongs to God, and what if we actually lived like it? That my friends is where transformation occurs.

Amen.

⁶ New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary Psalms, 924.

⁷ <https://www.babycenter.ca/a6578/developmental-milestones-grasping#>

⁸ NIB, 924.

⁹NIB, 924.