

September 1, 2019 Finding Peace In the Midst of Chaos
Psalm 94:16-23

The Bible opens with the Book of Genesis. Genesis opens with the declaration that it is God who created the heavens and earth. When we look closer we discover that God's act of creating was an act of putting things in order, making orderliness out of the reality of chaos. All of the great discoveries of science and the detailed explanations we have of how things work have come to be because of that assumption, that tenet of faith, that the world, nature, including human nature is an orderliness that was created out of the chaos of an absence of the created order. We ought not to be surprised that the same is true of our personal lives. When we let God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit enter into our experience, or to put it better when we recognize God is present, the chaos of life resolves into order, and with order comes peace.

As a preacher and teacher, a spiritual guide, if you prefer, I have nothing of real value to share with you, except my experience of the Lord, my experience of the Biblical word, my experience in prayer, as the Lord affects my life. Faith in Jesus Christ is first of all personal. Testimony, is the telling of personal details of experience, including experiences of God's presence, experience of the dependability of God's word, and the experience of the sharing of the Lord's effectiveness in bringing order into my chaotic life, and touching me with the power of HIS peace through a community of faith...the church.

Five years ago, cancer, introduced me to the power of chaos. And along with that faith in Jesus introduced me to a new dimension, a depth of God's power to create order in the midst of that chaos, and to bring peace into a realm of terrible pain.

Psalm 94, and particularly the part of that Psalm which I read to you, provides a commentary on my recent experience, and treatment including surgery in Belleville Hospital. "Unless the Lord had given me help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death. When I said, "My foot is slipping," your love, O Lord supported me." Imagine going to bed, everything seems to be normal, you turn out the light and drift off to sleep, and then you awake and the one thing you realize is that the pain is unbearable." At 3:00 am in the morning of August the 8th that was my experience. I had no idea of what was happening to me, and I confess, I was in utter panic. I asked, and I think Barbara would say I demanded, that she call an ambulance. My foot was slipping. I was losing any grip I ever had on things. The worst detail of all was that realization that I had no idea of what was wrong, what had happened, or why I was in such pain.

When the paramedics came into my bedroom, there was a momentary burst of relief. I remember thinking "thank you Lord." And then the pain avalanched back. I tried to be strong and utterly failed. I tried to answer the questions asked of me, and I have no idea as to whether or not I made

sense. I felt like a child. "It hurts. My belly." I remember they asked me if I had ever had a heart attack, or a stroke. And I probably repeated like a child, "It hurts. My belly." I remember being walked out the door by two female paramedics...one on each side...I know I was not steady on my feet...and what a relief to get on that stretcher in the driveway. I remember hearing Barbara's voice...she is always so calm in a crisis...she was not talking to me. She was talking to the paramedics. She said, "I'll follow in the car." The next thing I remember is, I was in cubicle, Barbara was at my side, I think she was holding my hand...and the nurse said..."I am going to give you something for the pain." I saw that I was attached to a drip, I had an injection site in my arm and the pain medication did its work. I do remember thinking something like, "Unless the Lord had given me help..." I would have been in real trouble. I vaguely remember being sick to my stomach. And the next memory I have is that same medical voice saying, "I am going to give you something for the nausea." There were more injections of pain medication. There were more injections of anti nausea medication. I would wake for a few minutes and then drift off into medicated sleep.

Psalm 94 verse 19 says, "When my anxiety was great within me, YOUR consolation brought joy to my soul." I know that there was an 18 hour period between the time I was admitted and the time I went into surgery. I remember very little of that except that there were moments when I bobbed to the surface. I was not terribly uncomfortable. I think I was

comfortable. I know I received more injections for pain and nausea, that I was sick a number of times. But I cannot say I remember those moments. I remember Barbara's presence at my side. I remember Rebekah's arrival at the hospital. I remember Rev. Jennifer Cameron's being with us, and her praying over me. And I think I remember thinking, 'well at least I'm not worried, perhaps even a joyful peace in my soul.'

I do not think of myself as a brave person. I do not believe that I handle physical pain well. I do remember Rebekah telling me quietly that hosts of people were praying for me. I do remember being emotional about that. I remember thinking that a person of strong faith would not cry because people are praying for me...but I could not stop the tears. And I was reasonably comfortable. And then sleep would overtake me again. I know I was told that I had a blockage. I know I went for an Xray and I cannot remember anything about that except being told to stand in front of a screen...and then told...No...the other way. I know I went for a CT Scan. I remember trying to get off the gurney and onto the bench of the machine and almost falling. I did not fall. I do not remember much more about that.

I realize it may seem very easy to give the Lord the credit for peace and even joy, when you are obviously medicated to the gills, but I do. I remember the chaos of the panic in the midst of pain. And just as clearly I remember the

peace of not being in pain and also not being able to sustain continuous consciousness.

At some point I remember (I think it was late afternoon, close to dinner time...but I could be wrong) I was visited by a surgical assistant who told me I was going to have surgery to remove an adhesion. I remember being visited by 2 surgeons who told me that I would be undergoing surgery (laproscopic) but that if they found anything requiring more attention, traditional abdominal surgery would be required. I remember that they left to finalize a strategy and when my surgeon, Dr. McIlreath returned he confirmed the former details and I had to sign consents for both possibilities and for potential transfusions. At midnight I was wheeled into surgery and I was back in my room in the hospital at 2:30 am on Friday. I know this has sounded like a medical report. If that is all you have heard you missed the point. The experience was not fun. The pain was bad. My testimony is that it was a Psalm 94 experience in the midst of which once again, I was confirmed in the truth of verse 22: The Lord has become my fortress, and my God is the rock in whom I take refuge. I am grateful for your prayers, concern and care. The love is real. The Lord's and yours. I wish I could tell you I am heroic. Or strong. I know I am weak, and I know it is only at that point I have any strength at all, which means, the Lord arrived and carried me through it all. Let us pray.