

Still I Will Trust in You. . . . A Letter to a Friend

Psalm 77

- ¹ *I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me.*
- ² *When I was in distress, I sought the Lord;
at night I stretched out untiring hands and my soul refused to be comforted.*
- ³ *I remembered you, O God, and I groaned; I mused, and my spirit grew faint.
Selah*
- ⁴ *You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak,*
- ⁵ *I thought about the former days, the years of long ago;*
- ⁶ *I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit inquired:*
- ⁷ *"Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again?"*
- ⁸ *Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time?*
- ⁹ *Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?"
Selah*
- ¹⁰ *Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High."*
- ¹¹ *I will remember the deeds of the LORD;
yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.*
- ¹² *I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds.*
- ¹³ *Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God?*
- ¹⁴ *You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples.*
- ¹⁵ *With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.
Selah*
- ¹⁶ *The waters saw you, O God, the waters saw you and writhed;
the very depths were convulsed.*
- ¹⁷ *The clouds poured down water, the skies resounded with thunder;
your arrows flashed back and forth.*
- ¹⁸ *Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world;
the earth trembled and quaked.*
- ¹⁹ *Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters,
though your footprints were not seen.*
- ²⁰ *You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.*

Sermon preached at First Presbyterian Church in North Palm Beach on 6/27/10 by Ron Hilliard.

Dearest Friend,

These are difficult days for you. In the midst of your situation there have been many tears, many sleepless nights, many long days. Your mind has been consumed with the circumstances that you find yourself in...wondering how you ended up in this place, how this could have happened to you, how your life is suddenly changing with what seems like no hope that life will ever get back to "normal". From where you sit today the future looks very dark,

Like the writer of Psalm 77 you have cried out to God over and over. You have reached out your arms in surrender...falling on your knees in the posture of submission. Like people of faith have done for years, you have cried out to God in prayer...pleading for help, pleading for God to hear you and respond, desiring God's presence in the midst of feeling all alone. In the midst of your difficulty you desperately want to know that God has not turned his back on you...that God has not stopped listening...that God is still present with you. You want relief from your anguish and grief. And you're tired. So you continue in the dark nights and long days to pray. Sometimes silently with tears running down your cheeks. Sometimes in a whisper that is barely audible. And sometimes in a voice that is so loud that you are afraid it might resonate throughout the house and wake up the family.

And as if the situation is not bad enough, it is made even worse because in the midst of all that is going on it seems that God is very far away, perhaps even absent...he refuses to hear you and answer your prayer. Your heart aches because it seems that your cries for help fall on deaf ears... and your outstretched arms find no solace in God reaching back. There is only silence and aloneness and darkness all around. You long to go back to the time when all was good, when God was near, when joy filled your heart. As you think of those days it makes these days seem even emptier and the nights even longer as you lay awake and ask yourself over and over again....

Where is my God? Does He still love me? Has God turned his back on me? Why do I feel so all alone? Is He angry? Will I ever feel close to God again? Why doesn't God do anything to help? If God is so merciful, why won't He forgive me?

In your circumstances it feels as though God's love is so far from you that you wonder if you will ever feel God's love again.

Based on Psalm 77, I would like to respond to you and address your situation:

First, it is important that you take some time to reflect on God's faithfulness to you in the past. This "remembering" of what God has done for you, your family, your friends, and you're reflecting on what God has done in the past for His people within the church and around the world will help you to stop focusing on your situation and instead will help guide you to focus on God. So I encourage you to remember, to meditate on God, to think about and reflect upon God's miracles, wonders, deeds, actions, and works. One way you do this is by reading God's word. The Scriptures record the "mighty acts of God" along with his miracles, wonders and deeds. There is no way to remember and reflect on God's faithfulness except through reading and meditating on His word. And secondly, it is important to remember what God has done specifically for you in your life. As you think about your life you will become aware of God's faithfulness through the many years....

- *God sent his son to die on the cross for you,*
- *God is the one who formed you and knit you together in your mother's womb,*
- *God is the one who claimed you in your baptism,*
- *God has watched over you every day of your life,*
- *God blessed you with gifts and talents and made you to be a unique one of a kind person,*
- *God healed your sicknesses, guided your life step by step, and walked with you through all the difficulties that you have experienced. It is so important to remember how God has been with you and working on your behalf through the years.*
- *And especially it is important to remember how God intervened in your life...opening your eyes to your need for him and he filled your heart with his spirit when you asked him to be the Lord of your life and promised to follow and serve him.*

As you think of all the amazing things God has done for you in the past, you will discover new things about God. And you may even join the writer of Psalm 77 in proclaiming that God's ways are holy and there is no god as great as our God (v. 13).

Secondly, notice in verse 15 how the writer of the Psalm focuses on God's redemption of His people. To redeem something means "to recover ownership of something"; "to set free, rescue or ransom"; "to save from a state of sinfulness and its consequences", "to restore the honor or worth or reputation of something". What a great reminder of how God has acted on behalf of those he called to be his people to redeem them and claim them for His own.

In the Old Testament, God's great act of redemption was the Exodus. God's people were slaves in Egypt. God acted on their behalf raising up a leader in Moses and in sending plagues to demonstrate to Pharaoh his power over creation and over all the gods that the Egyptians worshipped. When

Pharaoh finally let God's people go they left and came to what looked like a dead end when they reached the Red Sea. What dire circumstances....the Egyptian army closing in from behind them, the Red sea in front of them...blocking their path. Do you remember what happened? What God did to redeem or save his people? It was at this time that Moses said to them, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you. The Lord will fight for you...you need only be still." And then He parted the water so that his people Israel could move forward in following him. Just when it seemed hopeless, God acted on behalf of his people to open a way. Just when it seemed like no way was possible God redeemed His people. I trust that it will give you hope to remember that God has redeemed you...He set you free and purchased your life through the death of his son. He has redeemed you! And just like God acted to redeem his people in the midst of their dire situation, God will act in your situation to bring redemption to you! That is the great God we must focus on!

As the writer of Psalm 77 remembered and meditated on God's saving acts, he mentions several things that might help give you hope....

One...in verse 19 it says that "your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters." The path to redemption is to journey through the situation you are wrestling with. As much as Israel might have wanted to take another path, or hoped for God to provide a short cut, the path of redemption was to trust God and move forward through the mighty waters. In the same way, let me encourage you that God will provide a way through this...not around it, not denying it, not in making it easier. You are facing what might seem like a similar situation as Israel...an army pursuing you and at the same time facing what seems like a dead end. And it may feel like there is no hope. The same God who created the world from nothing, the same God who was powerful enough to part the Red Sea and save his people, the same God who has performed miracles and wonders and mighty deeds, is powerful enough to provide a way of redemption for you through the situation. When God was ready to act on behalf of his people he said to Moses, "why do you cry out to me. Tell the people to go forward." (Ex. 14: 15) Your redemption/salvation/victory will come as you move forward and as God takes you through your situation...through the churning waters.

Second, in verse 19 the writer also mentions that "God's footprints were not seen". At times God's presence is not noticed....He is present, at work saving and working, but his presence is not known to those He is leading. God works in our lives all the time, in every situation. He promises to never leave us nor forsake us. He promises to be at work in all our circumstances. Yet often, it feels as though God is neither present nor working. It is in those times that we trust what this psalm tells us...that God's footprints are not always recognizable to the human eye. That God's presence is often indiscernible to mere mortals. God's promise to you is not only will he bring redemption as you move forward....He also promises to never leave you nor forsake you, carrying you forward.....even if you can't see His footprints!

Third, verse 20, reminds us that God led His people like a flock, that God is a shepherd to his people. That was true of his people Israel. . . .and it is also true for you. God will lead you through this because He is your shepherd. He knows you by name, he knows what you need, he will watch over you, protect you, and lead you. It might be to still waters, it might be to green pastures, and it might be with his rod or with his staff. Know assuredly that God is not only present with you but He is your shepherd who will lead you. Listen for his voice in the midst of all the voices that call out to you. Keep your eyes on Him and trust where he takes you. . . .for he is your shepherd.

Lastly, verse 20 tells us that God led his people "by the hand of Moses and Aaron." God appointed and provided shepherds for Israel to lead them, point them to God, deliver God's word, and hold them accountable. In short, God raised up and called shepherds to be there for Israel in their time of need. In the same way, God will provide shepherds/people to walk with you through this difficult time. This verse reminds us that Moses and Aaron were appointed to lead the "flock". So remember that Moses and Aaron were shepherds for the whole community. And you are part of that community. . . .part of that flock. It is in the flock that God has given you that you will find the people of God to walk with you. In difficult times it is often a temptation to isolate yourself and try and get through it on your own. This rarely works as well as you hope that it might. Lone "sheep" usually do not survive. God will not leave you without shepherds and people to lead and walk with you. When God wants to work in someone's life, He often brings others into their life/situation and He uses them to accomplish his will. This will be true in your life as well. . . .God will bring others to walk with you, hold you accountable, encourage you, speak God's word to you, and announce God's forgiveness to you. These "leaders" will tell you about the God you follow. From their experiences of failure and redemption you will learn much. So be on the lookout for the Moses' and Aarons' that God will call to walk with you. You are not alone. . . .God is with you and God's people are with you too!!!!

My dear Friend. . . .it is my hope and my prayer that as you call out to God that you will wait and trust that He will answer you. But as you wait. . . .remember that God is with you; that God will lead you through this situation; that He will be your shepherd and He will walk with you. And trust that there will come a time when you will make it through this situation. . . .when you will make it through the churning waters. It is at that time you will rejoice, and God's people will celebrate, and when you too will proclaim the goodness of God. So trust right now that even though you can't see God's footsteps He is with you. . . .He is guiding you. . . .and He is at work. Our God will prove once again just how faithful he is. (Amen).

With love and friendship,

Ron

To the congregation... my friends it is my hope that in whatever situation you find yourself in today that you will pray honestly and that God will reveal Himself to you as your shepherd and as your guide. So trust that one day you will make it through and that God will redeem whatever situation you find yourself in today.

Benediction

May the Lord bless you and may He keep you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and may He be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with favor and may He fill your hearts with peace. Amen.