

Wisdom from the Woods by Karen Lund

When Rev. Susan asked me to write a “Wisdom from the Woods” piece, I momentarily thought, you must have mistaken me for someone who has her act together, someone who has nuggets of wisdom and is capable of deep spiritual thoughts during this scary time of Covid 19. I am a worrier by nature, the daughter of a worrier who must have instilled it into me in the womb. So, it is hard not to feel anxious when I watch the news and hear of all who have fallen ill and of those who have sadly passed away from the virus. I worry if my husband and me will catch it; I worry if my parents will catch it; I worry what will happen to the small business owners who have had to shut their businesses; I worry about those who have lost jobs and wonder what will happen to the economy. In normal times, interacting with people at work and at church could often make me gain perspective on issues and help me not let my worries carry me away. But staying at home, it’s easy to get into the loop of my own anxious thinking. In response to my vocalized worries, a friend asked me recently, “But aren’t you a spiritual person?” Well, yes, I am supposed to be. Yet, why then do I worry?

The Bible is full of passages exhorting us not to worry and to fear not. For example, Jesus said in Matthew 6:

25 Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear...26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?...33 But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

In EFM class, we’ve been going through the old testament at a rather rapid pace, and we recently read the book of Psalms. While I had read various Psalms before or had heard them in church, I had never read them in their entirety in one sitting. What stood out to me as I was sitting in my bubble of anxiety were the many psalms telling us not to fear, that God is in charge and that He will be our refuge.

When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. (Psalm 56:3)

I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. (Psalm 34: 4)

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. (Psalm 46: 1-3)

I think my favorite, though, was Psalm 91, which really spoke to me:

1 You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, 2 I will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.” 3 For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; 4 He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. 5 You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day, or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday.

At the end of this psalm, God speaks in the first person:

14 Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. 15 When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them. 16 With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.

I suddenly felt calmer, as if God was sending me a message through this psalm. This was God's response to my worries. He knows we will face "deadly pestilences" and the "terror of the night," but He promises to be there through it all.

Covid 19 isn't the first "deadly pestilence" to strike the planet Earth. But these verses have sustained many before us during their own scary times and pandemics. God has assured all of us over the millenia, "I will be with them in trouble." How is He with us? He is with us in many ways--in the faces of the health care workers who struggle to save lives and in the grocery store clerks who put out food for our daily needs. Many of them surely face their own fears, too, yet they show up every day for us. God is in the faces of the St. Peter's in the Woods congregation when we go on Zoom to talk with one another. He is in the faces of Rev. Susan, and Chad and everyone else who participate in making the Sunday online services for us. And He is with us when we sit alone in our homes wondering how long this is going to be and whether we will get through this, even when we don't always recognize Him. As Jesus said, worry won't add one hour to my life. But seeking God through His word and in the faces of His people will deliver me from my fear and will ultimately show me God's salvation.