

Call to Worship

Be filled with the Spirit in the following ways:

Speak to each other with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; sing and make music to the Lord in your hearts; always give thanks to God for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For it is God who gives the Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ.

Let us worship the God of such goodness with great joy!

Prayer of Invocation

Be found walking with us in this Lent, O God, as we move forward seeking the familiar, yet often finding the new and unknown. Send your Spirit to guide our steps toward you so we may find you. Be with us as we worship. Amen.

The Word

Psalm 121

A pilgrimage song: I raise my eyes toward the mountains. Where will my help come from?

My help comes from the LORD, the maker of heaven and earth.

God won't let your foot slip. Your protector won't fall asleep on the job.

No! Israel's protector never sleeps or rests!

The LORD is your protector; the LORD is your shade right beside you.

The sun won't strike you during the day; neither will the moon at night.

The LORD will protect you from all evil; God will protect your very life.

The LORD will protect you on your journeys—whether going or coming— from now until forever from now.

Living the Word

Songs for the Journey

Last week I was on my annual 'end of winter' vacation, a cruise, with a new travel buddy. Sherry is the wife of one of my husband Bob's high school football pals, and we have gotten to know each other over the years. It was her first cruise and so I did the planning with that in mind, praying to help make her experience a good one.

When I travel, the anticipation is a big part of the trip for me. I begin preparations and packing months and weeks ahead. I actually started moving all of the potential clothes and other items into the spare room a month ahead and the suitcase was pretty much ready a week ahead. She told me she hated packing and didn't start until 2 days before. I upped my prayers for this to be a good trip.

It was. When she wanted to sit in the sun, I went and sat in the shade and we both had comforting time to read. When I awoke at 7am and she was still sleeping, I rolled over intermingling praying and dozing for another hour. It became a restful and self-enlightening vacation.

How many of you make regular trips with friends or family or to see family, geared around some event or holiday? Do you ever go to visit the cousins, aunts and uncles? Or better yet have them join you on your trip? When does the journey really begin? Often for me the planning and anticipation can be the best part of the journey.

So first we begin by checking the calendar: What dates are open; or what date is the event on and is there enough time for travel both ways to be there? Who will be coming? Who might we invite along? How will we travel? Who will host? Who will cook or are we going to eat out the whole time? Have we packed the Cd's, downloaded some tunes on Spotify and tuned the radio – to have music to sing and move to while we travel? "Over the river and through the woods to Grandmother's house we go..."

During the Sundays of this Lenten season and on Holy Thursday, we are going to reflect on a series of Biblical Psalms, number 121-134, known as the Pilgrimage Psalms. They were sung by the Hebrew people as they made the pilgrimage each year to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. Since the Old Testament times of David, the Hebrew people had all tried to travel as often as possible to Jerusalem to celebrate how God had passed over them when the 10 plagues hit Pharaoh and Egypt.

God sent the plagues to convince Pharaoh to release Moses and the Hebrew people from slavery. Do you remember the list of plagues?

- Water turned to blood.
- Frogs
- Lice
- Flies
- Diseased Animals
- Sores
- Thunderstorm of Hail and Fire
- Locusts
- Darkness
- Death of each firstborn

Each time Pharaoh denied their leaving, another plague hit, but it passed over Moses and the Hebrew people and only hurt Pharaoh and the Egyptians. The Hebrew people had much to be thankful for and so the tradition of gathering together with family on the day named Passover is still a tradition and many Jewish people still make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem each year for this event. Passover is a time of celebration, but also a solemn remembrance of the power of God.

The disciples and Jesus had made this journey many times in their lives. They lived close enough to walk it, each year, though it was a journey of many miles from the different places they each grew up. We remember the story of Jesus at age 12, somehow left behind as his family traveled back home from that year's Passover Celebration. Jesus knew that he wasn't lost for he was in 'his Father's Temple.'" Even so, it was a scare for his parents when they realized he was missing from the family as they traveled home.

Because cousins met up with cousins and they all journeyed together, there were large groups of local friends and neighboring relatives that traveled together. What they all had in common was their Jewish faith in one God and their remembered stories of their history, along with the poetic songs of scripture, the Psalms, which they had all memorized as children.

When I would travel with my young sons in the car from Hayward to see grandma in River Falls, there were a red cassette tape we would listen to entitled "Wee-Sing Bible Songs." This was a favorite and often one of them would ask for 'the red tape.' It included a jazzed up version of "This Little Light of Mine," "Soon and Very Soon," and "Do Lord." It had so many songs that it took a whole hour to sing the whole tape through; twice through and we were almost to grandma's house.

During Lent and Easter we celebrate not only Passover from Moses time, but also Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem. That year's journey, which was made only days before the cross, Jesus knew where it would take

him and what was ahead. He had shared what was to happen with the disciples, but they didn't really understand. Even so, they knew it was a risk to enter Jerusalem, when the religious and political powers had made it known that they didn't like how this Jesus was stirring up the people.

Still, they prepared for the journey that they were to make with family and friend, just as they had many times before. This week we look at the pre-journey. How would Jesus prepare for this journey? First he would turn to God and then focus on the purpose for the journey. For King David, who wrote this Psalm, God also came first and then the purpose of the remembrance and his journey as King.

David had come from humble beginnings, but also as a Hebrew child, he knew the Passover story. As journeys can come in all distances and lengths of time, David had come from a shepherd boy to King. Many small journeys in his life happened within the larger life-long journey. By the time David wrote Psalm 121, you can hear in the words that he has made enough journeys to understand where to turn first in times of needing help.

*I raise my eyes toward the mountains. Where will my help come from?
My help comes from the LORD, the maker of heaven and earth.
God won't let your foot slip. Your protector won't fall asleep on the job.
No! Israel's protector never sleeps or rests!
The LORD is your protector; the LORD is your shade right beside you.
The sun won't strike you during the day; neither will the moon at night.
The LORD will protect you from all evil; God will protect your very life.
The LORD will protect you on your journeys—whether going or coming—
from now until forever from now.*

Like the Hebrews of Moses time, Jesus' people were oppressed by the government under which they lived, but also under the oppression of the Pharisees, leaders of their own religion. These people knew to turn to the Psalms during the hardest times of their lives and the better times of their lives as hope to be held on to for all of life.

Psalm 121 specifically speaks of God's protection when we journey, if the journey is a physical trip of just a journey through what is happening in our lives. For Jesus and the disciples, this is where they would begin their journey into Jerusalem, by focusing on their hope in the Lord.

Sometimes I think people today are planning for a life-long journey of celebrations, without the focus on their Creator, who gives them the reasons to celebrate, who always journeys with them through thick and thin and who protects them along the route.

The disciples and Christ packed with them on this journey the scriptures in their heart, the tradition of the ancient event and day of celebration, the reasoning of facing God on a journey of self-exploration and the experience of having done the trip many times before. All packed, they were ready to join many others as they turned their eyes to Mount Zion and Jerusalem, many dusty – uphill miles away.

My vacation didn't include leaving God behind, but it changed my normal venue of time and space long enough to find God in each moment. The outcome was one of spiritually feeling rested and fed by God's Spirit. This now becomes a quick plug for church camp...The journey to camp is counted in more than miles. It is a journey which can be a short break from our busy realities, long enough to experience God in a safe Christian setting.

We never know what journeys are ahead of us as we move onward in new ways – each year as we journey to Easter, it is an old traditional trip, yet fresh and new because we have changed during the year. If we learn this Psalm and know to turn first to God and to focus our journey, we will find hope and security in our travels, until it becomes the first place we turn.

The car is packed, are we ready to go? Have we forgotten anything? Did we check to make sure that the red tape is in the player so we can begin by getting everything in focus? Have we forgotten anyone? Is Jesus still praying in the Temple or coming with us?