

God, Our Refuge

The Rev. Dr. Peter G. James

Sermon Series: Live Faithfully

Psalm 46, 62, 131, 9:13, 108:4

“For God alone my soul waits in silence....”

- Psalm 62

I hate to wait! You hate to wait as well. Why do you suppose we complain about traffic so much? Because we hate to wait!

We place a premium on speed and efficiency. We have come to expect fast food, immediate access and instant messages.

Our daily life entails little acts of waiting. We wait in check out lines, in restaurants, in doctors' offices. Waiting also involves more substantial delays. Perhaps you are waiting for a job right now, waiting to get married, waiting for a relationship to reconcile, waiting for a business deal to materialize, waiting for a child to grow up or be born.

Psalm 62 speaks of waiting: “For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock and my salvation.” This text is repeated again in verse 5 for added emphasis.

The little adjective “alone” is central to our understanding of this verse. “For God alone my soul waits in silence...He alone is my rock and my salvation.”

In the original Hebrew, the word “alone” is placed first in the sentence. “Alone for God my soul waits in silence, from him comes my salvation. Alone, He is my rock and my salvation.”

The Psalmist, identified as David in the inscription, is under

some sort of attack by unspecified assailants in verse 3: “How long will you assail a person, will you batter your victim, all of you, as you would a leaning wall, a tottering fence?” David feels like a wall about to be toppled over and his troublemakers serve as the wrecking crew.

David doesn't find relief in external circumstances; he finds peace in God alone. “For God alone my soul waits in silence.”

Although the ground under David's feet is sinking sand, God is the solid rock on which he stands (Psalm 62:2). A mighty fortress is his God.

The musical composition you are about to hear in three movements was commissioned by Freddie Coulter to coincide with the opening of this sanctuary. At the time, Freddie had never been seriously ill in the first 64 years of her life. Her only visits to the hospital were brief, long enough to give birth to her three children. You can imagine her shock and dismay when the doctor delivered the diagnosis that she had colon rectal cancer. Suddenly, all of Freddie's earthly supports, her health, her career as a family counselor, even life itself, were threatened to be taken from her.

“For God alone my soul waits in silence.” Sometimes the only thing we can do is to wait for God's deliverance.

Waiting can be an active enterprise. Waiting can teach us valuable lessons.

Henri Nouwen writes in his book *Sabbatical Journeys* about a family of trapeze artists called the Flying Roudellas. This trapeze family divides their work in two: some serve as flyers and others as catchers. As you might expect, a flyer's job is to let go and a catcher's job is to catch. As the flyer swings on the trapeze, the moment comes when he must let go. His job is to remain as still as possible and wait for the catcher to pluck him from mid-air. The flyer must never try to catch the catcher. The flyer must wait in absolute trust. The catcher will catch him; the flyer must wait.

“For God alone my soul waits in silence.” Sometimes the only thing we can do is to wait for God's deliverance.

For God alone my soul in silence waits, my soul in silence waits. My hope is in God. Put your trust in God always, O people. Pour out your hearts before God, who is our refuge. For God alone my soul waits, for God alone in silence. Awake, O my God! Proclaim justice, and remember, and remember the afflicted! Rise up, O Lord! Deliverance belongs to You. Life up your hand, O Lord! Let the people gather round You. In the Temple of the Lord, In the Temple people are crying: “Glory!” Lord is in His Holy Temple. His eyes behold, and His gaze know us. The Lord is righteous, and loves righteous deeds. The upright shall behold the face of God. The Lord is in His Holy Temple. Glory!

Waiting can become a passive exercise. Sometimes we find ourselves waiting for events to

happen that are totally beyond our control. Waiting can also be an active enterprise. Waiting can teach us valuable lessons.

In Eugene Peterson's translation of the Bible, *The Message*, he interprets Romans 8:22-25 with the words, “Waiting does not diminish us; any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting. We, of course, don't see what is enlarging us. But the longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy.”

During the long, tedious days when Freddie subjected her body to the ravages of chemotherapy, she committed Psalm 131 to memory. Lest you think this is a remarkable feat, it should be noted that Psalm 131 is three verses long. She memorized the Psalm, not only because it was short, but on account of its marvelous insight into her situation. “I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time on and evermore.”

Babies bring joy to people. I watch you during baptism. Your furrowed brow softens and a smile forms on your lips. I don't blame you; little babies are so cute and cuddly.

But there's nothing as selfish as a little baby. I ought to know, I've lived with two of them. Babies are downright self-centered! Babies cry whenever they are hungry or tired or want to be held. What do they care if it's the middle of the night!

***Waiting is
God's way of
weaning us of
our selfishness.***

This is perfectly acceptable if a child is a newborn, but there comes a point when a child must be weaned of selfishness. Children in the process of being weaned are not happy campers. They fuss and whine over the loss of instant gratification.

In Psalm 131, David depicts a weaned child as a picture of contentment, resting quietly beside a nurturing mother. Waiting is one of the ways God uses to wean us of our self-centeredness.

When I was young, on the occasion of Mother's Day, I protested to my mother why there was no Children's Day on the calendar. Little did I realize at the time that Children's Day was, in effect, every other day of the year! Waiting is God's way of weaning us of our selfishness.

Following Freddie's surgery to remove a cancerous tumor and section of her colon, something went wrong. Her body began to shut down and she lapsed into a coma. Freddie could no longer breathe on her own, so she was attached to a respirator. The doctor gave her a 20 percent chance of survival.

For the six weeks Freddie was in a coma, Psalm 131 kept her company, "I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother."

A hymn continued to replay in Freddie's mind in her comatose state. It was the hymn, "Breathe on me, Breath of God." She hadn't sung it in years, yet all four verses came back to her clear as day.

Remember now, Freddie was on a respirator. She couldn't breathe on her own, so the respirator did her breathing for her. Since Freddie was in the coma, she had no idea she couldn't breathe on her own.

God's breath gives us life. When God created Adam and Eve, He breathed life into them. Breathe on me, breath of God.

For God alone my soul in silence waits. You speak in my heart and say, "Seek my face." Your face, O Lord, will I seek. I am not proud, Lord, nor have I haughty looks. I do not occupy myself with great matters, or with things that are too high for me. But I still my soul and make it quiet, like a child upon its mother's breast. You speak in my heart and say, "Seek my face." Your face, O Lord, will I seek. Like a child upon its mother's breast. I lie down and sleep. I wake again, For the Lord sustains me. Breathe on me breath of God till I am wholly thine; Until this earthly part of me glows with Thy fire Divine. Breathe on me, breath of God so I shall never die; But live with Thee the perfect life of Thine eternity. Breathe on me breath of God.

C. S. Lewis ruminates in his book *Reflections on the Psalms* about the time when he first began to believe in God. It bothered him that God expected and even demanded our worship. A God who craved or needed our compliments seemed to him like a vain woman fishing for compliments. God seemed to be saying, "What I want most is to be told that I am good and great." Lewis writes: "The most obvious fact about praise—whether of God or

“A delight is incomplete until it is expressed.”

- C.S. Lewis

anything—strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval or the giving of honor. But I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise.... The world rings with praise—lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising their countryside, players praising their favorite game—praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles, even sometimes politicians or scholars....”

“I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: ‘Isn’t she lovely? Wasn’t it glorious? Don’t you think that magnificent?’ The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when speaking of what they care about....”

“We delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is the appointed consummation. It is not out of complement that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete until it is expressed.”

Lewis is absolutely right! “A delight is incomplete until it is expressed.”

What would it be like if the 90,000 fans who attend the Redskins/Jaguars game today watched the game without uttering

a sound? If we are not permitted to praise what we admire or celebrate what we love or speak about what we value, our joy would be incomplete. God’s love for people is not merely something to be dutifully acknowledged, it’s meant to be celebrated and enjoyed.

Praise is the proper response for a creature to render to its Creator. I will exalt you, O Lord, for you have lifted me up. Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens and your faithfulness to the clouds. Your glory is above all the earth. In the temple the people are crying, glory!

You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive blessing and honor; glory and power forever and ever. No mortal is worthy of such praise. In the temple of the Lord your people cry glory! Let your glory cover the earth! May our words and lives declare your glory!

I will exalt You, O Lord! You have lifted me up. Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, and Your faithfulness to the clouds! Your people feast upon the abundance of Your love and drink from the rivers of Your delight. Therefore my heart dances for joy, and in my song will I praise You. Exalt Yourself above the heavens, O God! And Your glory above, above all the earth! For Your loving kindness is greater than the heavens, greater than the heavens and Your glory above all the earth. In the temple of the Lord, In the temple of Lord, In the temple people are crying, In the temple people are crying, Glory!

