

FIRST LESSON: Proverbs 3:5-8
SECOND LESSON: 1 Peter 5:6-11
May 24, 2020

“Resistance and Trust”

Sermon © Lisa C. Farrell

Trust God. Resist evil. These are the basics of living our faith. From Proverbs to I Peter the message is the same.

Peter says to “humble yourself under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.” Proverbs advises us, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes.”

It is a wise person who knows that they’re not wise. Few things are more dangerous than a know-it-all with power. People who think they know everything do not listen to the wisdom of others, and they can’t learn from their mistakes. But those who are humble can receive new information and make good decisions. Peter calls us to humble ourselves before God who knows the truth in all things.

But humility on its own is actually not enough. We can be humble and have no relationship with God. To walk with God is to trust God with our lives. Peter says, “Cast all your anxiety (or cares) on him because he cares for you.” And Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: “Don’t be anxious, saying, ‘What will we eat?’, ‘What will we drink?’ or, ‘With what will we be clothed?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things; your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first God’s Kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:31-33) Humility and trust go together. Unfortunately, neither are easy.

Many people suffer from anxiety, and Christians often feel guilty for being anxious. We say to ourselves, *“If I would only trust God more, I wouldn’t be so worried all the time . . . a real Christian shouldn’t feel this way.”* But if we look at the psalms, there’s a lot of anxiety there. Just read a few of them! Invariably what the psalmist does is go back and forth between affirming who God is and lamenting his current circumstances. We could almost call it a therapeutic process of complaint, despair, remembering what God has done in the past and proclaiming what God will do in the future. David trusted God. The other anonymous authors of the psalms trusted God. But that didn’t mean they never had strong negative emotions and experiences.

Trusting God does not mean that we don’t experience stress. Trusting God means we turn to God with that stress. It means bringing all of our worries and fears to God in prayer. And this leads us directly to the second part of the equation today—resisting evil, because when we are struggling with anxiety, we are vulnerable and the Enemy knows this. Anxiety makes us ripe for doubt and susceptible to believing negative things about ourselves or

others. We become restless and start looking for peace in the wrong places. We self-medicate with drugs or alcohol, relationships, gambling, workaholism, Netflix binge watching, **anything**—other than reality.

Peter says, “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.” James 4:7 says, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” The two actions are inseparable. Only when we are aligned with God’s will can we effectively resist evil.

Many people have rejected the idea of the devil. Perhaps they have not encountered evil face to face. I have, and I do believe there is a spiritual force of evil at work in the world. I can’t claim to understand it, or even define it overmuch. Those who contend that they can provide us with a whole demonic hierarchy mapped out like some kind of perverse civil service are basing their ideas on pure speculation and some ancient and pretty suspect writings. All I can really assert based on scripture and experience is that the spiritual realm of good and evil is real, and that Christ gives us both protection and the power to overcome. Human evil must be combatted with human tools, but in many situations the two are mixed, and that is where prayer comes in. We must pray against the evil taking place in the world. It is important to be socially active and to speak out, but in the face of real evil that is wholly insufficient. **We must pray.** We must be sober, alert, and pray. Our Enemy is real and is like a roaring lion stalking its prey.

I don’t have any experience with lions, but I do have a cat named Philander. I named him after a late member of this church, Philander Delphey, because if ever there was a cat who would smoke a cigar if he could, it’s Philander. Philander, Phil for short, has been completely failing in his duty to catch the mouse in our kitchen. But he has been gleefully stalking and killing rodents and frogs out in the yard. He left me a mouse in the vegetable garden this week. Perhaps he thought I was hungry. But if you’ve ever watched a cat hunt, they stalk silently. They crouch and approach with care. The victim doesn’t know what hit it before it is pounced upon. Even more disturbing, cats like to play with their prey and torment it a bit before finally killing it. That’s why it’s such a good image for how the devil attacks us. We don’t see it coming until it’s too late, and torment leading to destruction is the objective

So how can we protect ourselves? Well staying close to others helps! This is a rather ironic thing to say during a time of social distancing. But if I’m in a village in Africa or India in an area where there is a lion going around killing people I’m going to stay inside and with a group. Lions aren’t stupid. They aren’t going to attack a large well-armed group. They pick off those who are alone. They look for the isolated ones. The same principle applies spiritually. We can protect ourselves by staying closely connected in fellowship. Satan’s first tactic is inevitably to try to separate a Christian from church. A lone Christian wandering around without support is easy pickings. When we’re in fellowship we are more likely to be hearing scripture and talking about scripture. When we’re in fellowship others are praying for us. When we’re in

fellowship, we are joining in prayer for our sisters and brothers and the world. And when we're in fellowship, if we're in trouble, we're not alone. We are not defenseless. We can protect ourselves by sticking together, and we can defeat the devil through prayer, made even more powerful by the fact that we are praying together.

Peter promised us that the God of grace who is well aware of the sufferings we experience in this world will restore us and make us strong, firm and steadfast. Mr. Rogers said in any crisis, look for the helpers. They'll always be there. In any crisis we can also look for the lessons. They will always be there too. We don't grow stronger when things are easy. We grow stronger in adversity and in situations that make us anxious. Peter reminds us to cast all our cares on God because God cares for us. We're not in this alone. Circumstances that look like nothing good could possibly come out of them can produce unexpected and beautiful fruit in our lives. We don't have the whole picture. We don't know the last line in the story. God does.

When life threatens to overwhelm, if we trust God with all our hearts and acknowledge that we don't have all the answers, if we turn to God in prayer and give our lives to God, a way will be found. God always finds a path for us through the darkness. God always provides. And as vulnerable as we might be on our own, together we are a powerhouse. The devil knows this. That's why he tries so hard to bring discord and division. In this time of social distancing it is more important than ever that we stay spiritually connected. We can resist the Enemy and all his plans when we hold fast to our love for one another and entrust our lives to God. Amen.

Proverbs 3:5-8

- 5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
- 6 in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.
- 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the Lord and shun evil.
- 8 This will bring health to your body
and nourishment to your bones.

1 Peter 5:6-11

- 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. 7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.
- 8 Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.