

God Is Our Rock

Scripture: Psalm 62

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January 1, 2012

Morning Service

People of God: A new year is like a new layer of freshly fallen snow. At first, everything is covered in white and nothing is disturbed. But soon, the snow ploughs come along to clean the streets and we shovel our driveways. The kids get out to play, making a snowman or a snow fort; while when the dog goes out for a walk, the dog dirties the white snow with a yellow tinge. What began in the early morning, as a fresh layer soon has a different picture by nightfall.

So it is with a new year. The opportunity of a fresh start. But when I take out my day timer, I put in the meetings, special events and other activities that have already been planned. As a snowplough creates access to the wider world, so these scheduled events provide structure to the year. There will be creative, joyous moments in the year. Like kids playing in the snow, we will have our moments of laughter and joy. But just as dogs make a mess in the snow, so we will also experience the messiness of this sin-infested world. Our fresh start of today will look very different even by tonight.

As the year unfolds, we can expect certain things to occur, in our personal lives, in the life of this congregation, and in our world. After all, events of the past will shape the future. We have expectant mothers, so we can look forward to some more baptisms this year. And I doubt we will go this year without a funeral, though it has happened one year in my ministry in your midst. But even in that year death touched some of our lives. So it will be again this year. That's the painful reality of our world.

In terms of the world, we can expect the economy to dominate the headlines—specifically, the issue of government debt—not just in Europe but also in North America. But there will be surprises in what makes the news. After all, who would guessed at the beginning of last year that we would have witnessed the “Arab” spring that has lead to revolutions in

Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and has engulfed Syria in civil strife? Who knows where this will lead in this coming year—progress towards democracy or to a different form of tyranny?

As well, the devastating forces of nature are completely unpredictable. Last year, the earthquake and subsequent tsunami created chaos in Japan. Where and when will the next natural disaster hit? We do not know.

There are many things about this New Year we do not know. What we do know, what we can count on, what we can depend upon, is God. God knows the future. God is leading the events of our lives and our world towards that goal of making all things new. We can depend on him. In the midst of our uncertainty, we need to depend on God. And God will not fail us.

Psalm 62 speaks about the complete trust we can have in God. Many commentators note how this Psalm expresses this trust in God like no other psalm. One wrote:

There is scarcely another psalm that reveals such an absolute and undisturbed peace, in which confidence in God is so completely unshaken, and in which assurance is so strong that not even one single petition is voiced throughout the Psalm.

Another one wrote:

Scarcely anywhere do we find faith in God more nobly asserted, more victoriously triumphant; the vanity of man, of human strength and riches, more clearly expressed; courage in the midst of peril more calm and more unshaken, than in this Psalm. (quotes in Boice p. 509)

Those are some strong ringing endorsements of this Psalm. They make it sound as if it is easy to have this confident trust in the Lord. I am not so sure, it is that easy.

I know that there are many believers who struggle to have this confident faith in God. But whatever the quality of our faith, this Psalm does present us with a God, who is our rock and our salvation, a God who is strong and loving, a God whose promises and actions are not dependent upon the quality of our faith—a God, then, in whom we can rely on in this coming year, whatever this year brings us.

The Psalm does begin with a resolute confession of faith in God. But what we need to hear is not just the quality of this confession, but the description of the One in whom the Psalmist puts his faith:

My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.

The focus here is on God. God and God alone is the source of our salvation. God alone is our rock and fortress.

The Psalmist here uses traditional metaphors to describe God. And we echo them so quickly that perhaps we overlook the meaning these comparisons are trying to make. What does it mean that God is our rock and fortress?

I suppose the second one is easiest to comprehend: A fortress. A place of security and safety when enemies attack. And in the ancient world, with their limited weapons, someone seeking refuge in a fortress, which was well supplied with water and food, would outlast any enemy at the gates. No wonder this place of security became a great illustration for what God does for his people.

The comparison of God to a rock might be more difficult to understand how that developed. But a rock is more than a stone, which you can easily pick up and throw. It's more than a boulder that might have to be wedged out of a field. For the Psalmist, a rock represented a solid piece of ground; the top piece of a mountain. A rock couldn't be moved. It would always be there. A rock is firm and stable. A solid foundation.

Even today this idea of a rock as something stable and reliable is used by insurance companies. Prudential explicitly used this image of a Rock in their advertising, with the slogan: "get a piece of the Rock." Indeed, wouldn't we want our insurance and financial dealings to be as solid as a rock?

Well, that's the image used for God. God is our Rock.

Now the Psalmist makes his confident expression of faith in this God, not when everything is going good in his life, but when he is encountering great difficulties in life. Verses three and four describe a time when the Psalmist is being assaulted by his enemies. He is being pressed in from all sides and he feels as if he is like a leaning wall, ready to topple over.

Life isn't always smooth sailing. While indeed, we wish each other a happy new year, we know there will be times, when life is not happy. Pressures at work or pressures within the home can get to us—let alone trying to be a faithful witness and disciple of Jesus. There are times when we feel like a leaning wall and a tottering fence and we wonder how long it will be before we just topple over.

Then we need to hold on to our confession in God, a God who is our rock and our fortress. Then we need to bring to the foreground the confidence we can have in God. That's what the Psalmist does:

Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him.

He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress I will not be shaken.

My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. (vs. 5-7)

The Psalmist encourages himself with these words. Is there a possibility that the leaning wall will fall over? Yes, it's possible. But not when he turns to God. In God, he can find an answer to the onslaughts of his enemies.

Earlier I quoted from two commentators who spoke about the glowing confidence of this psalm. So much so that no petition is voiced. Technically, that is true. The Psalmist never calls upon God to do something. He urges himself to find rest in God. He urges others to trust in the Lord. But he never asks God to do something.

Yet I think that in making this confession of faith, the Psalmist implicitly does ask God for help. Indirectly, he is looking for God to intervene. By describing his problems and then re-asserting his faith in God and describing in detail who this God is, the Psalmist is basically asking for God to be true to his character.

In other words, in saying, "God is my rock and my salvation", in the face of his enemies, he is asking God to act as his Rock. Be the fortress he needs God to be in this time of trouble. These words of confession are like a prayer: Lord, be my rock and my fortress so that I will not be shaken. Be true to your word. Because my salvation and my honor depend on you.

But it can be a confident prayer. Because God will be true to his character. God will fulfill his promises. He will be the source of our salvation. Having just gone through the Christmas season, we have seen how God fulfilled his promises through Jesus Christ. In Jesus, we have our ultimate rock and fortress.

The Psalmist urges himself and others, then, to place their faith in this God. Again, the stress is on God and God alone. Yes, there are alternatives. But they will fail. In verses nine and ten, he warns against putting our hope and trust in people or riches:

Lowborn men are but a breath, the highborn are but a lie;
if weighed on a balance, they are nothing; together they are only a breath.

Do not trust in extortion or take pride in stolen goods;
though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them.

In the midst of our ancient or modern problems, the temptation is to find the solution either in people or in money.

People disappoint us. Politicians can't deliver on their promises. Those who toppled dictators in this past year are discovering their replacements often are not much better at ensuring justice.

As for money, it's no guarantee for a good life. Some who have received the best, most expensive presents last week can be the most miserable people this week.

Our ultimate trust cannot be, either in people or riches, but only in God. And so the Psalmist ends with once again describing the kind of God we have: You, O Lord, are strong. You, O Lord, are loving. Jesus captures both these aspects when he taught us to pray to our heavenly Father, heavenly to describe his power, Father to describe his compassionate love he has for his children.

Let us, then, head into this New Year by keeping our eyes focused on this God. He is our Rock and our Fortress. Because of that, we can trust in him at all times. Amen.