

## 9.11.22 – Pentecost 14 & 9/11 Remembrance

### “Defender God!”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

#### **Psalm 18:1-6, 46-48 (GNT) ~ Pam**

*David's Song of Victory*

<sup>1</sup> How I love you, Lord!

You are my defender.

<sup>2</sup> The Lord is my protector;

he is my strong fortress.

My God is my protection,

and with him I am safe.

He protects me like a shield;

he defends me and keeps me safe.

<sup>3</sup> I call to the Lord,

and he saves me from my enemies.

Praise the Lord!

<sup>4</sup> The danger of death was all around me;

the waves of destruction rolled over me.

<sup>5</sup> The danger of death was around me,

and the grave set its trap for me.

<sup>6</sup> In my trouble I called to the Lord;

I called to my God for help.

In his temple he heard my voice;

he listened to my cry for help.

<sup>46</sup> The Lord lives! Praise my defender!

Proclaim the greatness of the God who saves me.

<sup>47</sup> He gives me victory over my enemies;

he subdues the nations under me

<sup>48</sup> and saves me from my foes.

O Lord, you give me victory over my enemies

and protect me from violent people.

**L: These are the Lord's Words to Comfort David. C: Thanks be to God!**

#### **Acts 7:52-60 (GNT) ~ Pam**

<sup>52</sup> Was there any prophet that your ancestors did not persecute? They killed God's messengers, who long ago announced the coming of his righteous Servant. And now you have betrayed and murdered him. <sup>53</sup> You are the ones who received God's law, that was handed down by angels—yet you have not obeyed it!”

*The Stoning of Stephen*

<sup>54</sup> As the members of the Council listened to Stephen, they became furious and ground their teeth at him in anger. <sup>55</sup> But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw God's glory and Jesus standing at the right side of God. <sup>56</sup> “Look!” he said. “I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right side of God!”

<sup>57</sup> With a loud cry the Council members covered their ears with their hands. Then they all rushed at him at once, <sup>58</sup> threw him out of the city, and stoned him. The witnesses left their cloaks in the care of a young man named Saul. <sup>59</sup> They kept on stoning Stephen as he called out to the Lord, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” <sup>60</sup> He knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord! Do not remember this sin against them!” He said this and died.

**Leader: These are Testimonial Words from Luke, Paul & witnesses. People:**  
Thanks be to God!

**Please pray with me:**

Defender God, thank you for these stories of faith and strength to wait for you in times of trouble. We come today with many burdens yet hear that you are triumphant over all our enemies and fears. As we remember a transforming event in our history today, 9/11, let us weave these verses into our healing and grief. Lord, you are with us today here as you were with our people on that horrific day. Speak through our study today and through this witness and messenger. Lord, have mercy upon us. Amen.

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We take a break from our parables today to recognize the 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks in New York City, Shanksville, PA, and locally here at the Pentagon. Most everyone remembers where they were on that transforming day, and if you knew one of the 2,997 people killed that day, it is a necessary remembrance. There were 19 terrorist hijackers, 2,763 civilians at the World Trade Center, 189 people at the Pentagon, and 44 people on Flight 93 that we remember today. The whole world mourned with us in 2001, including the late Queen Elizabeth II, who died this week. Much of today’s news coverage will be about both events, as the ceremonies for the queen capture the world’s heart and respect. We share our condolences with the British people, the Commonwealth, and territories. We ask forgiveness for the decades of inhumane colonization and give thanks for provision and resources of God’s Kingdom.

It is normal to have conflicted feelings on this day, as we recently recognized one year after pulling out of Afghanistan, and the thousands

of civilians and soldiers killed or injured fighting terrorist takeover of that country. While the Taliban is still in power there, during the messy evacuation, over 100,000 people had been flown to safety. No matter the world's turmoil, we have an all-powerful God who we praise, worship, and turn to in times of trial. The passages today are somewhat familiar and were chosen to remind us how He was and is present for us and others in these difficult times.

Psalm 18 is written by a poet and credited to be the words of David testifying how God had defended and saved him from enemies of war and from Saul's murdering hand. His enemies had made false accusations, and he could not defend himself. He praises God and loves him for being his strength; to admit strength was needed in a situation is to be humble enough to admit personal weakness. Recall the last two weeks of sermons about the foolishness of greed and pride, and God's call for us to be humble servants, like the tax collector. The psalmist's humble language refers to tools of armament as well as to God: his shield, buckler, and "horn of my salvation." Horns were symbols of brute animal strength. The human subject of this psalm was surrounded by death and images of hell yet remembered to call on the Lord as his savior, as I'm sure many did in the Towers, on the plane, and at the Pentagon, as the people tried desperately to escape both death and destruction. The torrents of hell refer to temptation and sin, but I think of the fires caused by the jet fuel in the Towers and the Pentagon; we know about the flames and jet fuel odor from the testimonies of survivors and responders. In such a time, I hope I would be like Stephen looking upward to see God and my savior Jesus, and then falling comfortably asleep in their presence.

When we face our enemies, we may plead with God to defend us, but do we remember to thank him for all he's done up to that moment? We thank him, saying grace daily, for our food, shelter, family, and friends, but do we often, in our testimonies, reflect on how he brought us out of danger and thank him for his **presence** beside us in those trials and testing? Some do of course, but I admit I forget to share my gratitude for that consistent presence in my life until I am asked, and then I share my story. Like we heard last week in Solomon's warning from God, we must turn to him to receive his grace and mercy:

<sup>14</sup> and my people who are called by My name humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. <sup>15</sup> Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to the prayer offered in this place.

In the last verses 46-48, the poet gives us a doxology of sorts, praising God for both victory and defense. It is not just gratitude, but also a proclamation that God made himself known as a living God in that deliverance, much as we can share our experiences with Jesus as living savior and defender.

Stephen proclaims before a hostile Jerusalem Council his own testimony of centuries of God's presence through Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Solomon and Christ! Then he chastised the leaders about their complacency and failure to keep God's laws and how they crucified Jesus: “<sup>52</sup> Was there any prophet that your ancestors did not persecute? They killed God's messengers, who long ago announced the coming of his righteous Servant. And now you have betrayed and murdered him. <sup>53</sup> You are the ones who received God's law, that was handed down by angels—yet you have not obeyed it!”

They were furious, as you know this story, and as they ran him out of town, they stoned Stephen. He fell and looked up to God in prayer, seeing his glory, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus, the Son of God at his right hand. He didn't just keep that vision to himself, he shouted it out loud, which made the leaders even angrier. But he asked God to forgive them, much like Jesus' last words at the Crucifixion according to Luke, Stephen said: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"<sup>60</sup> He knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord! Do not remember this sin against them!' He said this and died." Some translations say he fell asleep, which hints at how the Jews viewed death.

I hope these and other passages available to you in the Bible give you comfort and assurance that, in times of trial, all members of the Holy Trinity are with you if you call on God's name. Yes, we have human responsibility for our duties, just as the late Queen Elizabeth modelled, but as she did, we must also submit to the Lord's guidance and care.

Micah 6:8 reminds us:

He has told you, O mortal, what is good,  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice and to love kindness  
and to walk humbly with your God.<sup>NRSVUE</sup>

As many of the victims, survivors, and responders did on this day of terror in 2001, **may we live daily Psalm 121:**

- <sup>1</sup> I lift up my eyes to the hills—  
from where will my help come?
- <sup>2</sup> My help comes from the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth.
- <sup>3</sup> He will not let your foot be moved;  
he who keeps you will not slumber.
- <sup>4</sup> He who keeps Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.

- <sup>5</sup> The Lord is your keeper;  
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
- <sup>6</sup> The sun shall not strike you by day  
nor the moon by night.
- <sup>7</sup> The Lord will keep you from all evil;  
he will keep your life.
- <sup>8</sup> The Lord will keep  
your going out and your coming in  
from this time on and forevermore. Amen! |/

**Will you pray with me?** Lord, thank you for this annual reminder that life is a precious gift. Help us to be humble in all our worldly and spiritual affairs. Help us to be courageous evangelists to share the story of Christ's sacrifice. May we recall the heroism and bravery in all we remember this day. Thank you for your strength, guidance, grace and mercy as you serve as our Defender! Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. In all the ways our world is wounded, please help your people to show grace and be healed. In Jesus' name we pray, **Amen.**