

Discipleship Moment

Sermon Text: Acts 1:12-14

I used to be afraid of the dark. I would lay in my bed and stare at my open door, the hallway light was on (I insisted on it growing up), and my imagination ran wild—trolls, monsters, ghosts creeping into my room, ready to get me. I would make sure my feet and arms weren't hanging off the edge of my bed because—as every child knows—the monsters and trolls in our rooms can't get us if our feet and arms are on the bed. And I waited, terrified, for sleep to finally overtake my little mind. Now that I am an adult, there are different monsters that haunt me at night: concern for the health of my children, concern for the health of my wife, concern for hospital bills and car payments, concern for the house we just purchased, concern of people and situations that I must face at work or in my personal life. These monsters are the kind of monsters that keep me up at night, staring at my open door (or watching Netflix).

For thousands of years, our Christian and Jewish ancestors used the book of Psalms as a kind of training in prayer. Martin Luther said during times of laziness in prayer, or times when he didn't want to pray, he would take his psalter (book of Psalms) and go into his room, he would read the Ten Commandments, the Creeds, (if he had time) he would read from the New Testament, and would read some psalms. The Psalms work as the prayer book of the Bible and first prayer in the Psalms is not Psalm 1, but Psalm 3. It says this: "O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God" (Ps. 3:1-2). This is the prayer of someone in trouble, of someone who can't sleep because of their enemies (or monsters) and is crying out for rest from the concerns and worries of life. After this cry comes a reassurance, "But you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head. I cried aloud to the LORD, and he answered me from his holy hill. I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the LORD sustained me. I will not be afraid of many thousands of people..." (Ps 3:3-6). With the person's monsters creeping at the door, and piling up at the windows of their bedroom, they can rest in the assurance that God will rescue them, and that God will protect them and sustain them. This is a psalm for people who can't get to sleep because of life's worries.

In the teaching yesterday, we heard about a promise from God, that he will "work all things for the good of those who love" Him. This is a gift that God gives to His children, who trust in Him and the work that Jesus did for us in his life and death. If we love God, He *will* work out all the good things and bad things that happen to us for our good, ultimately. This is the promise that the psalm writer is holding onto in Psalm 3, "But you, O LORD, are a shield about me...the LORD sustained me." And this promise brings confidence "I will not be afraid..." and also peace (and sleep) "I lay down and slept; I woke again..."

The most important promise (and the most difficult to live out) in the Christian life is that we are loved children of God through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. God wishes to lavish us with peace and confidence in His love. Prayer is the way that we can live in this promise. It connects us with God, who then downloads the Holy Spirit into us, who gives us assurance, confidence, and informs us of God's promise. Just as the writer of Psalm 3 experiences—the tumultuous concern and worry is defeated by the Holy Spirit and replaced by peace and rest. We see in the Gospels that Jesus often times went away to pray to God—and in the midst of his life, we know that he had many enemies. I am sure he prayed this psalm himself, and we can find comfort in the fact that Jesus himself experienced this same kind of worry and prayed to God to protect him. And we ourselves can be filled with the same Spirit that filled Jesus—by our prayers and conversation with God we can we receive rest from our worry, and the confidence to say, "I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me..."

And, as a result, we glorify God and share His love—as Psalm 3 ends, "Salvation belongs to the LORD; your blessing be on your people!" Let us join together and pray for this same confidence and this same promise.

Going Deeper

1. Pastor Erik talked about *waiting* on God to act or give you instructions in prayer. How good are you at waiting for things you want? Are you okay with waiting in line at the store? or in traffic? Why do you think people become impatient with waiting?
2. What are your habits of prayer? Do you pray everyday? A few times a week? At meals? Keep track this week of how often you pray.
3. Does praying bring you joy? Why? If it doesn't, why not?
4. Try to pray before every meal this week. Thank God for the food you eat, and the earth that produces the food for us. What other things can we be thankful for at meal times?
5. Using the Prayer Request card from the bulletin, pray for each person on the requests list, even if you don't know them. If you do not have a Prayer Request card, pray for those you know who are suffering.
6. Spend time praying for Pastor Ben and Pastor Erik as they begin to shepherd New Life and cast vision for God's will in our church and community.