

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

March 9, 2019

Community Prayer Service

Psalm 91

I like to keep little reminders of my family in unexpected places. Like this postcard that Hollis sent me when he was in preschool. It stays in a file of recipes and every time I look through that file, I am reminded of the sweet innocence of a child's love. I keep this change purse in my top dresser drawer. It was my grandmother's and I would get my ice cream out of it every time I heard the ice cream truck come down the road. It reminds me of her generous and unconditional love.

I am a big fan of these little reminders. Simple pleasures that make love feel close, that help me slow down and be thankful and appreciate each day I am given. And when I find these little gems on days that are long and difficult, they serve to bring joy into my heart when I need it the most.

Even early Jewish and Christian communities were known to keep these kind of little reminders around. In fact, they would put words and phrases from Psalm 91 (that we just read) in amulets around their necks so that they could be reminded of God's love for them. Words like...

"Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them. With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation."

How good those words must have felt – that this God, your God, loves you so much that he is listening and responding to your needs.

Yet, sometimes, it's hard to remember that we are not alone and that God hasn't forgotten us. When we feel discouraged or when life has given us more than we think we can handle, we start to shut out the things that truly matter – like friends, and family, and even God. We close off our hearts and our minds and convince ourselves that we aren't worth the goodness that life has to offer. We convince ourselves that God won't deliver us and won't help us through our troubles. I know you have felt that way at one time or another.

That's why reminders are important. They draw us back to God's promises so that we don't feel so alone.

Psalm 91 reminds us that with God, we won't be overcome by the difficulties that life may bring. All we have to do is to keep coming back to the love we are so freely given and the forgiveness we are so generously granted.

And this is where a light bulb went off for me about the importance of the Lenten season. It's a time for us to remember. To remember God's love for us – a love that heals and redeems, a love that is unconditional, a love that stands beside us when everything else has let us down.

It's a time of self-reflection and repentance so that we come ready to bear our burdens, our fears, and our mistakes. We come with our weaknesses and our doubts. We come because all too often we have forgotten. Lent helps us remember.

And so we give up things that are important to us during Lent. Or sometimes we take on a new practice of meaning. We create habits that brings us closer to God so that we may remember.

What might your reminders be this Lenten season?

I ran across some simple advice the other day to help us in our practice of remembering God's love for us. It was simply to pray each evening. Pray for the following day – that you will be able to draw closer to God and truly remember how much you are loved. Turn your Lenten practice over to God and trust that God will be there with you guiding you and encouraging you and indeed loving you through the season.

There is no specific formula to guide your Lenten practice. There is no one right thing to give up or add in. It will be different for each of us and it will be different from year to year. But the key is to find the things during Lent that help you remember. Remember that God loves you. Amen.