

# Sermon

## Full to the Brim — Under God's Wing

A Sermon for Cary Presbyterian Church

Sunday, March 13, 2022

Second Sunday in Lent

### Prayer for Illumination:

**Lord God, you are the one to whom we turn in our most desperate hours. We call upon you and await an answer.**

† **When you give it we praise you.**

† **When you keep silent we wonder about you.**

**Yet, while we wonder, we commit to walk in your ways. As the Psalmist exhorts you to “incline your ear,” so we know you ask that we, too, incline *our ears* to hear a word from you.**

**Show us your steadfast love. Hide us in the shadow of your wing in the hour of peril, and for our part we will sing of your love always.**

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

*Luke 13:31 At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” 32 He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. 33 Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ 34 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 35 See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”*

**[Music]**

*Psa. 17 A Prayer of David.*

*1 Hear a just cause, O LORD; attend to my cry;  
give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit.*

*2 From you let my vindication come;  
let your eyes see the right.*

*Psa. 17:3 If you try my heart, if you visit me by night,  
if you test me, you will find no wickedness in me;  
my mouth does not transgress.*

*4 As for what others do, by the word of your lips  
I have avoided the ways of the violent.*

*5 My steps have held fast to your paths;  
my feet have not slipped.*

*Psa. 17:6 I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God;  
incline your ear to me, hear my words.*

*7 Wondrously show your steadfast love,  
O savior of those who seek refuge  
from their adversaries at your right hand.*

*Psa. 17:8 Guard me as the apple of the eye;  
hide me in the shadow of your wings,*

*9 from the wicked who despoil me,  
my deadly enemies who surround me.*

*10 They close their hearts to pity;  
with their mouths they speak arrogantly.*

*11 They track me down; now they surround me;  
they set their eyes to cast me to the ground.*

*12 They are like a lion eager to tear,  
like a young lion lurking in ambush.*

*Psa. 17:13 Rise up, O LORD, confront them, overthrow them!  
By your sword deliver my life from the wicked,*

*14 from mortals—by your hand, O LORD—  
from mortals whose portion in life is in this world.  
May their bellies be filled with what you have stored up for them;  
may their children have more than enough;  
may they leave something over to their little ones.*



- C. The sentiment of being the apple of God’s eye and the image of being shadowed under the wing of God while I slumber is comforting.**
- D. To be the “Apple of God’s Eye” suggests that God would have the same instinctual protective response that the eyelid has whenever something unexpected approaches the pupil.**

**II. But while the phrase of focus for today’s message is a beautiful poetic phrase, the Psalm as a whole may be harder for you.**

- A. Psalm 17 is an imprecatory psalm — that is it is a little bit like Dana Carey’s “Church Lady” persona. It wants to “say a prayer against” someone. *in* - towards + *precari* - pray.**
  - 1. Curse - might be a way to say it.**
- B. So I think it wise to say a word about imprecatory psalms...**
- C. One way to pray an imprecatory psalm is to see the “enemy” not as other people, but as those things which are attacking us.**
  - 1. A few years ago I had a dear friend who had just received a difficult cancer diagnosis and who was looking at significant surgery, followed by radiation, and then long-term hormone treatment. One evening he read aloud Psalm 118 and as he angrily declared, “I cut them off!” I sensed his healthy defiance of cancer in the words of the Psalm.**

*Psa. 118:10                      All nations surrounded me;  
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!*

- 11 *They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side;  
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!*
- 12 *They surrounded me like bees;  
they blazed like a fire of thorns;  
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!*
- 13 *I was pushed hard, so that I was falling,  
but the LORD helped me.*
- 14 *The LORD is my strength and my might;  
he has become my salvation.*

*Psa. 118:15            There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the  
righteous:*

- “The right hand of the LORD does valiantly;  
16            the right hand of the LORD is exalted;  
                 the right hand of the LORD does valiantly.”*
- 17 *I shall not die, but I shall live,  
                 and recount the deeds of the LORD.*
- 18 *The LORD has punished me severely,  
                 but he did not give me over to death.*

**D. Another way to manage the difficulty of  
imprecation in the Psalms is to realize that  
*sometimes* we find the prayers of “brothers and  
sisters who are away” in the words of the psalm.**

**1. Nearly every time I read Psalm 17 this week I  
thought of Ukrainians whose country has been  
violently invaded by Russia. I can hear  
sentiments which are perfectly understandable  
in their circumstance...**

- Psa. 17:8            Guard me as the apple of the eye;  
                 hide me in the shadow of your wings,*
- 9 *from the wicked who despoil me,  
                 my deadly enemies who surround me.*
- 10 *They close their hearts to pity;*

- with their mouths they speak arrogantly.*
- 11 *They track me down; now they surround me;  
they set their eyes to cast me to the ground.*
- 12 *They are like a lion eager to tear,  
like a young lion lurking in ambush.*

**As the people of Ukraine have evacuated by the millions and seen the devastation of cities and the deaths of non-combatants daily . . . I can hear Psalm 17 differently...**

- Psa. 17:13 Rise up, O LORD, confront them, overthrow them!  
By your sword deliver my life from the wicked,*
- 14 *from mortals—by your hand, O LORD—  
from mortals whose portion in life is in this world.  
May their bellies be filled with what you have stored up for them;  
may their children have more than enough;  
may they leave something over to their little ones.*

**E. Finally, I must say that for all the difficulties of the imprecations of Psalm 17 — this psalm, at least, is an *honest prayer* to God.**

1. **So often our prayers to God are so polite as to be vapid...it makes me wonder if they must leave God dozing off, as we ask for little and expect even less.**

**III. Each one of us, has place (maybe more than one place!) in our lives where the petition of Psalm 17 makes sense.**

- Psa. 17:8 Guard me as the apple of the eye;  
hide me in the shadow of your wings,*
- 9 *from the wicked who despoil me,  
my deadly enemies who surround me.*
- 10 *They close their hearts to pity;  
with their mouths they speak arrogantly.*
- 11 *They track me down; now they surround me;  
they set their eyes to cast me to the ground.*

12 *They are like a lion eager to tear,  
like a young lion lurking in ambush.*

- A. We are ill, or have loved ones who are ill.**
- B. We know financial burdens and stresses**
- C. We worry for friends and family who we fear will be caught up in the violence currently engulfing Ukraine and (potentially) Europe.**
- D. We see the endless and increasing polarization of our own nation into groups who despise one another...**
- E. It can, in fact, begin to feel like we are surrounded on every side by deadly troubles — that the darkness is like a ravaging lion eager to ambush...**

**IV. It is precisely into this kind of circumstance that we are given the poetry of Psalm 17.**

- A. As we make our way through Lent to the place of resurrection — we cling to the faith of the Psalmist who shows remarkable trust that God is, in fact, *for us* and for *justice* too.**
- B. We make our way asking for God to preserve and defend us as the apple of God’s eye.**
- C. To shelter us in the cleft of God’s wing.**
- D. One way to think about having life “full to the brim” is to realize that the fullness of life to which God invites us is *not* a life emptied of trouble and struggle.**
  - 1. What makes our lives “full to the brim” is *not the absence of conflict and trial* so much as it is**

*the presence of the God* who loves and shelters  
and guards *in the midst of* the hour of trouble.

- E. May our voices join the voice of the Psalmist this week as we pray for ourselves, for our friends and family, and for a world on the brink of great darkness  
— that all may have life “full to the brim.”**