

This Sermon was written by Rev. Gary Smith for the First Congregational Church

Like a Rock

11-8-20

Psalm 62

Have you heard the expression, “solid as the Rock of Gibraltar?” I paid little attention to it until I was fortunate enough to not only see it but, climb it. The Rock of Gibraltar sits on a peninsula at the southern tip of Spain at the entrance to the Mediterranean. There is only a narrow channel separating Spain from Africa and the Atlantic from the Mediterranean. Throughout history it has been a significant rock, climbing 1400 ft. above the sea. The British took control of this postage stamp piece of land in 1709. English is spoken here and the British pound is the currency.

It has an amazing history because of its strategic location. During WWII over 30,000 British troops were stationed there and a Royal Naval Base was established. Not even Hitler and his war machine was able to overtake the rock. You can see Africa in the distance and a number of ships constantly using this strait for passage between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. If such a rock could talk, it might speak of how solid and secure it is. If a special rock can enlist our attention, think about how much more safe and secure we can be placing our trust and confidence in God, creator of the Rock of Gibraltar.

The scripture says, “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 will be shaken.” This great psalm of faith instructs us to place our hope, our confidence in God, our rock, salvation, refuge and protector.

There is another reference in scripture to rocks that is important to our faith. It comes from the words of Jesus. You know it. The foolish man built his house upon the sand but the wise man built his house upon the rock and when the storm came and wind blew, the house built on the sand was destroyed but the house built on the rock stood still. Jesus was saying this in regards to his teachings from The Sermon on the Mount. They are words, thoughts and principles to build your life on. “On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.” They are to be the foundation of our spiritual lives. Don’t be angry with others, instead, love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you.

There is no doubt that Jesus is our rock and a sure foundation on which to build our lives. Paul would say, “No other foundation can anyone lay than the one laid which is Christ the Lord.” When Peter made the good confession, Jesus responded with, “On this rock I will build my church.” We have understood that foundation stone to be the good confession of our faith. “I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Savior and Lord of my life.”

Now, how is the church like a rock? This room we gather for worship is called a sanctuary, a place of refuge and what is it that protects and holds the church together? I think it is the rock. I like Fred Craddock’s explanation.

A man was walking one afternoon and passed a mason who was sorting rocks. He had a pile of them and he was eyeing each and every one making sure they were alike in size and shape. When asked, "What are you doing?" The mason said, "I'm getting all the same sized rocks together to build a church." "Why?" "Because I want it to stand the test of time." He started stacking those rocks and they were all alike. A few days later they had fallen down.

Some people think that the best method to build a church is to get people from the same economic, social, educational and theological backgrounds together.

Around the corner was another man with a pile of stones. You've never seen such a mess in all your life, no two of them alike, little ones, big ones, dark ones and light ones. "What are you doing?" he was asked. The man said he was building a church. "You're crazy. The man down the street had them all alike and he could not make them stand." "This church will stand," he said.

And he went over to a tray and took something like a hoe and began to stir something back and forth. It looked a lot like cement and he put healthy doses of it between the rocks. Sixty-five years later the church is still here. It was the stuff in between, but it was not concrete. You know what it is that keeps the church standing. It is the faith, commitment, acceptance, love that cements and holds the church together.

Our scripture today, Psalm 62, is addressing personal problems facing the author. He feels attacked with distortions of his character. He has been bullied and picked on. His enemies think that he is a push over with no strength, like a leaning wall or tottering fence in the wind that can be toppled. His environment around him is corrupt with people dragging him down. In spite of all this he is strong in his faith. God is his rock and he encourages and comforts others. He believes that every adversity is an opportunity to grow in trust in God. This is his conclusion, "God is my mighty rock, my refuge, trust in him at all times, O people."

Your family and your congregation are like rocks when you stand up for one another, support, forgive and love each other. There is a beautiful oil painting of a landscape with a storm approaching, dark clouds, wind blowing the tree branches and it is getting dark. In the corner of the picture is a rock formation with a sparrow on a nest in the cleft of a rock, safe and secure.

Augustus Toplady, a Methodist minister, was walking from one town to the next around the turn of the 18th century when he was caught out in the open during a severe storm. He found some shelter in a rock. Later, remembering the scripture, "I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand" (Ex. 33:22) he wrote the words, "Rock of Ages Cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee." Not only did he experience salvation from the storm, but then applied his experience spiritually believing that Jesus had saved him from his sins as well.

Let us sing together Rock of Ages.