

**The Reverend Marjo Anderson**

**1-Narrative – Summer – Psalms – Week 3**  
**Psalm 1, 27:1-6**

**30 June 2019**  
**Salem, Bridgeport**

**“Finding Hope”**

I will never forget that day. I was an intern at Saint Paul’s over on Noble Avenue. The congregation was in the middle of its annual stewardship appeal and as part of that we were in the parish hall, listening to one of our members give a temple talk. I don’t remember the man’s name but he was from Germany and was a successful businessman and he was telling us why he made a financial pledge to the congregation. He said he believed what the Bible taught: that everything that he had belonged to God, that he was only the manager of those gifts, and that all God asked was that he return to God the first 10% of what had been entrusted to him as a sign of his faith, his commitment, and his love. He didn’t give to support the church budget, he didn’t give because he wanted to support particular programs, and he didn’t give because he liked the pastor; he gave because he loved God and wanted to honor the church, Christ’s bride. There was conviction in his words, and passion in his tone, and I could see a joy in his eyes – a joy that I wanted.

At the time Mark and I weren’t giving any money to church. When I was growing up my parents put money in our offering envelopes for us to put into the offering plate. When I got to college I didn’t go to church much. When I was in seminary and learning about stewardship I knew I should be giving, but I wasn’t. I remember actually thinking, “Maybe the church I’m working thinks I’m giving to my home church, and maybe my home church thinks I’m giving to the church where I’m working.” I wasn’t giving because I didn’t think we could afford it. I was just an intern on a stipend. Mark had a new consulting business with just 2 clients, a major one & a smaller one. We owned a three family house and we rented out the second and third floor to pay our mortgage. We didn’t make a lot of money but we made enough to pay the bills – just.

But that day when the man at Saint Paul’s spoke, my heart was moved and I wanted to experience the same kind of faith and commitment and love that I saw in him. That day I decided to tithe – to give the first 10% of any income I received to my congregation. I didn’t know how we would afford it, but I believed the man when he said that God would make it work – somehow.

So I began tithing and for the first month all went well. Then things started happening. The next month the tenants moved out of our second floor, and we couldn’t find new tenants. The following month Mark lost his major client. The month after that the tenants moved out from our third floor, and again, we couldn’t find anyone to replace them. A month later Mark lost his remaining client. And finally my internship – and its stipend – came to an end. At this point we had zero income. I remember turning to God and saying, “This isn’t how it’s supposed to work! I trusted you! I gave you the first 10%! I thought things were supposed to work out!” I didn’t hear God answer me, but something inside me kept telling me I needed to keep my commitment. I remember sharing my situation with the pastor I had worked with when I was in seminary – Pastor Fred McGee from St. James in Southbury. He told me he couldn’t help us a lot, but he could pay me \$10 if I would type up the bulletin for him that week. I typed the bulletin and he paid me \$10.

I remember looking at the five dollar bill and the five ones and thinking I could really use the whole \$10. But I took one of the singles and I gave it back to him, saying, "Take this as my offering to the church".

It was a really scary time, but eventually things got better.

We found tenants for both floors, Mark got new clients, I got a new job, and we paid off our credit card debt and get back on track financially.

It was a horrible situation to have to go through, but I am grateful for it because since that experience, any time that I've had financial worries or concerns, I've been able to look back on that episode and remember how God brought us through.

In the midst of darkness, that memory never fails to shine a light of hope.

Now I am assuming that if you have been coming to church regularly for 50 or 60 or 70 years, God has acted in your life.

So right now I'd like you to think back to a time when God brought you through some crisis, and I'd like you to briefly share that story with someone who doesn't know it.

So find one or two other people who don't know your story, and share it with them.

We'll take five minutes – and I'll let you know as each minute passes to make sure everyone in your group of 2 or 3 has a chance to share....

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What kinds of things were shared? (just real briefly - like in a sentence or 2)....

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Thank you. Thank you for sharing. What you've just done is one of the most important things you can do.

There are two things that provide us with faith in the midst of doubt, with hope in the midst of despair, with light in the midst of darkness.

The first of those is our own past experience.

One of the reasons the suicide rate for young people is so high is that they do not have personal experience to fall back on.

When their lives fall apart there's nothing in their history to tell them that it will get better. But if they get through the crisis, if God brings them through, if God carries them through, then the next time they can remember that and it will be just a little bit easier to have hope.

The more experience we get of God bringing us through, the more we can trust that God will continue to bring us through.

The Psalms tell us that when God has brought us through a crisis, when God has defeated our enemies, when God has provided us the victory, then we are to give God the glory.

And that means more than just saying a quiet, private "thank you" to God.

It's not enough to keep our thank yous to ourselves. It's our duty and responsibility and joy to share our thanks publicly, and to give God the honor and praise and glory for what God has done for us.

We witness to what God has done for us not only to give praise and glory to God's name, but to strengthen each other's faith.

As I said before there are two things that give us hope in the midst of despair.

One is remembering what God has done for us in the past; the other is hearing what God has done for others.

Sometimes we may not even be aware of all that God has done in our lives, and sometimes even if we are aware at the time, we don't always remember.

So we may only recall the highlights, and those may be few and far between.

If it's been a while since God has acted in a dramatic way in our lives,

we may remember it in our minds, but forget how it feels,

and that decreases the memory's power to provide the hope we need.

And in those times it's important to draw on the faith of others.

If I'm going through a health crisis and I've never been through such a health crisis before,

then hearing from someone else how God brought them through something similar

might just give me the hope and the faith and the trust I need.

What you all did today was to be church – because church is the place where faith is born and nurtured and grown.

If we only talk about the faith of people in the Bible, it's hard to relate to our lives today.

The Bible was the story of God's mighty acts in a particular time and place.

But God's mighty acts are not confined within the covers of the Bible.

God's mighty acts continue in my life and in your life and in the lives of everyone around us.

As important as the Bible stories are, what's more important are the stories of our lives & how God is at work in us –

here and now.

We are here for each other – to share in each other's joys and sorrows,

to witness to how God is at work in our lives, and to strengthen one another's faith.

No matter what crisis you face, God is with you and God will bring you through.

And when God does bring you through, then share the story, witness to God's power, and celebrate God's love.

Because here's the thing: the more we share our stories, and witness to God's power, and celebrate God's love,

the more stories we will have, and the more of God's power and love we will see.

Thanks be to God who has won for us the victory! To that One be all glory and honor and praise! **Amen**