

Garnet God
Psalm 71
August 21, 2022

I grew up in the City of Lakes (Minneapolis) and the Land of 10,000 Lakes (Minnesota). I lived near 4 city lakes, close enough to walk or bike to them. I swam in them; walked, ran, roller skated, biked, cross-country skied around them thousands of times. I loved those lakes. I still do.

My first church as an ordained pastor was in Madison, Wisconsin. My church was on the shores of a large lake, Lake Mendota with a shoreline of 15 miles. My second church was in Glassboro, NJ. There, I had an even bigger lake - the ocean.

I have always been around water, so when I came here to Arizona, I thought for sure I would be homesick for water. But I discovered I love rock. The mountains speak to me. I never get tired of looking at our Santa Rita Mountains; they are constantly changing. I am always looking for unusual rocks when I take walks or hike. As I told the children, I have a copper plate filled with various kinds of rocks sitting on my kitchen table that I look at all the time.

Rock has a high calling in the scriptures. For the people in biblical times, rocks provided shade, shelter, and safety in the wilderness and were used to construct alters, temples, houses and city walls. When God wanted the people to commemorate important events, whether for the community or personal, people piled rocks on top of one another as an altar. Think about the Ten Commandments – they were etched on rock by the finger of God. One of the disciples, Simon, name was changed to Peter, which means rock.

Rock is important in the Bible. I believe the most important use of rock is in our scripture reading this morning.

Before we read, let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer. Amen. (Psalm 19:14)

You will notice as I read, the scripture has been color coded. I'll tell you about that later.

Read Psalm 71 (selections):

¹ In you, LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame.

² In your righteousness, rescue me and deliver me;
turn your ear to me and save me.

³ Be my rock of refuge,
to which I can always go;
give the command to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.

⁴ Deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of those who are evil and cruel.

⁵ For you have been my hope, Sovereign LORD,
my confidence since my youth.

⁶ From birth I have relied on you;
you brought me forth from my mother's womb.
I will ever praise you.

⁷ I have become a sign to many;
you are my strong refuge.

⁸ My mouth is filled with your praise,
declaring your splendor all day long.

⁹ Do not cast me away when I am old;
do not forsake me when my strength is gone.

¹⁰ For my enemies speak against me;
those who wait to kill me conspire together...

(the author goes on describing what his enemies are doing to him. We pick it up in verse 14)

¹⁴ As for me, I will always have hope;
I will praise you more and more.

¹⁵ My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds,
of your saving acts all day long—
though I know not how to relate them all.

¹⁶ I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, Sovereign LORD;
I will proclaim your righteous deeds, yours alone.

¹⁷ Since my youth, God, you have taught me,
and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds.

¹⁸ Even when I am old and gray,
do not forsake me, my God,
till I declare your power to the next generation,
your mighty acts to all who are to come.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Scripture is filled with passages referring to God as our Rock. The word “rock” may seem, at first, a strange title for God. Yet consider the people who called God their Rock. The Hebrew people were desert wanderers and dwellers, and life was not easy. Sometimes the desert sun was unrelenting. In such a time, a large rock provided welcome shade. Sometimes wild animals appeared, or a human enemy; a rock could be a point of defense.

Psalm 78:35 And they remembered that God was their rock, And the Most High God their Redeemer.

Sometimes there was flash flooding, (we know what that is like) a rock provided firm footing, and a place to wait out the natural disaster.

Psalm 61:2 From the end of the earth I call to You when my heart is faint; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

Sometimes a traveler was lost in the wilderness. The only landmark, then, might be a rock: either a natural formation, or a stone set upright in the ground by a traveler who had passed that way before. I told in Friday’s email blast about cairns, intentional stacked rocks that help hikers find their way on the trail.

1 Samuel 2:2 “There is no one holy like the Lord, Indeed, there is no one besides You, Nor is there any rock like our God.

I think of experiences I have had with rocks. I have told stories of backpacking in Glacier National Park. A group of us decided to take a hike up to Cracker Lake. It was supposed to be beautiful, a lake surrounded by tops of mountains. As we started out, the sun shone brightly. As we climbed up the mountain, the clouds moved in and the wind was picking up; we knew a storm was coming.

We quickly found a place to put up our two tents near Cracker Lake, and as we did so, we heard “crack!” We all looked up, and in midair was a boulder falling towards us. It seemed to come at us in slow motion. It missed us and landed off to the side of the tent. It was then that we noticed all the large rocks surrounding our tents. Apparently, this is a common occurrence at Cracker Lake. Rocks can be dangerous. God is our rock, and sometimes God can be dangerous.

There was not much we could do. It was getting late, and we needed to eat dinner. Our small backpacking stoves would not light because of the wind. We eventually found a ledge surrounded by rock that protected us from the wind. Rocks are shelter. God is our rock, and God shelters us from the storm.

Where we were eating we could not see our tents. At one point during dinner, we looked up over our protective rock ledge...where there was once two tents, now there were none. The wind had taken one tent, stakes and all, and ripped it to shreds. The dome tent was rolling down towards the lake. We saved it. We took some of those boulders that were dangerous before and now very useful, and placed them on the stakes of the remaining tent. That tent wasn't going anywhere. God is our Rock, and provides what we need in times of trial.

Living in Minnesota, we often took trips to the shore of Lake Superior. The shore is all rock. I would walk out on these rocks on the shores of Lake Superior. I placed my hand the rocks that had been in the sun and felt the warmth. I sat on them and was comforted by the warmth. God is our rock, and gives us comfort and warmth and peace.

Isaiah 26:4 “Trust in the Lord forever, For in God the Lord, we have an everlasting Rock.

The picture on the front of your bulletin is a garnet rock. I wish I had this piece of rock; it is so beautiful. Garnet is formed from extreme heat and pressure. It causes the minerals to reform into the beautiful red.

The author of our Psalm is experiencing great stress and pressure in his life, and cries out to God at the beginning of the Psalm: rescue me, deliver me, be my rock of refuge. Be my fortress.

After this desperate cry, the Psalmist begins to think back over his life. He remembers how God has taken care of him through every phase of his life.

In the bulletin, I have color coded these memories with the color red as the Psalmist looks back on his life. He starts from the very beginning: verse 6 “From birth I have relied on you; you brought me forth from my mother’s womb.

In verse 5, he remembers his youth: “For you have been my hope, Sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth.” Later in the Psalm (verse 17), the Psalmist says, “Since my youth, God, you have taught me...”

Then the Psalmist thinks about his current age; we learn he is elderly. Verse 9 “Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone.”

Towards the end of the Psalm the writer says in verse 19: Now that I am old and gray, I know you will not forsake me. Because I have looked back over my life. I have seen how you have protected me, saved me, walked with me, delivered me, done great things from my birth and up to old age. I know that you will carry me through today.

Have you done that? Looked back over your life and saw how God has worked, met your need, gave you strength, spoke to you through the scriptures, worked through other people. As you face trouble today whether failed relationships, financial woes, a failing body, review your life, and as you look back, see where God was working as your shelter, your strength, your comfort, your rescue, your Rock. God, who is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow, is still your Rock today.

One person said it this way:

When you need confidence in a troubled time: Look Back

When you need courage in a troubled time: Look Forward

When you need help in your weariness: Look up

God has not left you this far, He will not leave you now.

This Psalmist is a seasoned follower of God, who has trusted God throughout his whole life even though he still has troubles, anxieties, worries. Yes, we will still have them, too.

Which leads to the blue sections of our Psalm.

This Psalmist doesn't keep God to himself. This is an older person who trusts that God will deliver from enemies, and therefore praises God, the One who has always been there with him through the ups and downs of life. Then he makes a promise: I will tell of your wonderful deeds to others.

End of verse 6: I will ever praise you.

Verse 8: My mouth is filled with your praise, declaring your splendor all day long. My mouth will tell of your righteousness, of your salvation all day long.

Verse 14 As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more. My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds, of your saving acts all day long – I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, Sovereign Lord, I will proclaim your righteous deeds, yours alone.”

Verse 18 : Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come.

What is amazing is this Psalmist isn't merely asking God not to forsake him as he gets older; he is asking the Lord to give him many years in order to declare God's glory to the generations to come! What an amazing view of life!

Psalm 95:1 “Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!”

How can I forget the story in the Gospels. Jesus is entering Jerusalem on the donkey, and people are praising Jesus. It upsets some people, and they tell Jesus to make his disciples keep quiet. And Jesus says, “If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out” (Luke 19)

If we don't do it, then the rocks will.

Those of us who are getting older and are old, we have a special privilege. We have the chance to see God's faithfulness over a lifetime. Our troubles do not grow smaller as the years go by, but all our experiences can strengthen our confidence that God will always be there. Therefore, we do not rely on our own strength because our bodies are becoming weaker, but, as the Psalmist, we rely on our Rock, who is our strength.

I end with a poem, a modern-day Psalm, so to speak (by Pastor Louis Pronnicki):

You may be aging with a back or knee brace;

you may no longer have the energy to join in the chase;

there is probably aging showing on your face,

but God wants you to age with grace.

Aging is when you might have trouble tying your shoe lace;

and you may, in a group of young people, feel out of place,

but God wants you to age with grace.

Aging is when doctor's visits become an ever-increasing part of your pace,

and when your memory is fading without a trace;

but when you are aging with grace, you look forward to moving to a higher place.

O Lord, lead us to the Rock that is higher than I.

As did the Psalmist, let us proclaim faith in our Rock: The Apostle's Creed.

The hymn we will sing is new. In our Psalm the author is looking back over his life and saw God there. In this hymn, God looks back over our lives and says "I was there." We will play it through once.