

## **“Thank God We Stand on the Rock” Psalm 40:1-3**

October for Canadians should be the month we think about harvest and the blessings we enjoy as a nation, celebrating with thanksgiving. However, many Canadians today are more grateful for a long weekend than they are for harvest and the blessings God has poured into our lives. As God’s people, we see the bigger picture, and acknowledge the hand of God in all our blessings and we take time to give thanks to God for all He has done for us. Therefore, this month, our services will focus on the theme of Thanksgiving.

This morning’s passage from Psalm 40 introduces us to the theme of Thanksgiving for the rescue God has provided for us and how we should respond with songs of praise and gratitude. Hear the Word of the Lord:

### **READ PSALM 40:1-3**

This Psalm starts with a statement that does not describe most people I know. It says that the Psalmist waited patiently on the Lord. We are not good at that. We want God to fix everything right now. We tend to treat God like the person at the drive in window at MacDonald’s, putting in our order and expecting we will find our needs met as soon as we get to the end of the drive through.

But the Psalmist said he prayed, cried out to God and told him all about the struggles he was facing, and then he waited patiently for God to answer – in His time and in His way. The Apostle Paul reminds us that patience is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in our lives, but many of us barely have buds little own fruit. I think of the Apostle Paul’s life and ministry and remember how he was a prisoner for the last five years recorded in the Book of Acts. Two years he waited for the governor to do something after he was arrested for simply proclaiming that Jesus was alive and was the long awaited Messiah. Finally, a new governor is appointed and Paul gets a hearing, just to have to wait another three years before he is transferred to Rome to have his case heard before the emperor. Though Paul continued to minister as a prisoner, I am sure he prayed to be set free. What we do not read is that he fretted or protested or despaired – “he waited patiently for the Lord,” and he knew that “God turned to him and heard his cry.”

The Psalmist says he was in a slimy pit. That word can mean “ruins” – his life was in ruins. It can also be translated “tumult” – chaos was all around him. No matter which translation of that word you use, the picture is clear: he was in desperate need of help and he was calling out to God for that help.

What does your slimy pit look like?

- A pit of fear because of the diagnoses the doctor just gave you?
- A pit of anger because of the challenges of COVID-19?
- A pit of frustration because you are trapped in a situation you see no way out of?
- A pit of loneliness or despair?
- A pit of regret or shame?
- A pit of hopelessness?

There are so many pits we can fall into today, and I am sure the enemy of your soul would love to see us stuck in the pit.

This week I discovered a pit of anxiety – worry. I am not one to worry or get worked up too easily, but recently it has become clear there are things that can cause me to get anxious. Thursday morning at 2 am a small hand reached over and gently roused me from my sleep. “I think I need to go to the hospital” came Lise’s voice in the night.

Within minutes we were at the emergency doors of the hospital. Lise’s heart was racing and her arm was aching and she felt terrible. I took her into emergency and was told I had to leave. I could sit in my car and they would phone me, or so they said.

For two hours I sat in the car waiting to hear something. I was praying, but also worrying. Heart issues were one of the concerns that led to her recent hyperparathyroidism surgery. She also has a string of family history with heart issues. Was she having a stroke? Heart attack? Or something else? The minutes dragged by and my prayers were simple: “let her be okay, Lord!” Finally at 4 am I went inside and asked the staff what the update was on my wife. They kindly chased down the nurse on duty and she explained to me that all was okay, and Lise was feeling okay. They were just waiting for her to see the doctor and I could take her home. I breathed a great sigh of relief, and was able to relax a little in the car, giving thanks to God. In fact, I actually fell asleep waiting the next hour and a half for Lise to be released from the hospital.

But in those few hours I experienced the reality that I too can easily slip into a pit of anxiety and even despair. As I sat in the car it really was a battle to keep calm and to trust. I knew how to pray, and certainly that is what I was doing, but the emotions were strong. I cannot imagine what it must be like for those who wait weeks, months or even years to hear from the doctor.

But the Lord hears our desperate cries, even at three in the morning! I felt His presence in my car despite my anxiety... I am so glad God does not demand perfection from us before he will show up. In our doubts and fears and slimy pits He comes to us.

The Psalmist discovered that God lifted him out of the pit...

To lift someone out of a pit you must reach down into the pit and draw them up. You get dirty because you get involved. Our God does not sit on his throne in heaven and simply watch us struggle. He comes to us, He comes into our slimy pits, and He lifts us out, if we let Him.

This is the mystery of the incarnation: God came to us to rescue us from our pit of sin. And when that rescue mission included His death, He was willing to die for us. Romans 5:8 tells us, **“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** When we were still in the slimy pit of sin, Jesus came to rescue us.

Our Psalm goes on to say that after we were rescued from the slimy pit God put our feet on a rock, he gave us a firm place to stand.

When you are going through the storms of life, you want a place where you can put your feet down that is firm and secure. When the storm hits you do not want to be out in a boat that

feels like it will capsize at any time. You want your feet firmly planted on the ground – solid ground that will not give way despite the winds and waves.

Many years ago I took Lise to Cameron Lake, a beautiful spot in the Glacier National Park. It is not a large lake protected by majestic mountains, so I thought it would be a safe place to launch the canoe and show Lise how great boating can be. We started paddling, making our way along the shoreline towards the far side of the lake. We were almost there when a terrible wind came out of nowhere causing huge waves to form on the lake. There was no place to land the canoe so we carefully turned the boat around and headed back to where we started.

Did I tell you Lise does not swim and has a great fear of deep water? As the rain fell and the winds blew against us and the waves splashed into our little boat, Lise was panicked. I tried to call her over the winds, but all she heard was “Paddle!” so she paddled for all she was worth, stroke after stroke trying to hit the water as we rose and fell with the waves. We were running with the wind so we were soon to the shore where we started, and as we neared shore I told Lise she could stop paddling. But she did not. In fact, I think she would have paddled all the way to the car. She wasn’t stopping until her feet landed on solid ground.

Praise God, our feet are planted on a rock, the firm place in life.

And as we face the storms and battles of life – from COVID-19 frustrations to concern for our nations, families and friends – there is a rock to stand on. His name is Jesus. Jesus is referred to as the chief cornerstone, the foundation stone, the rock out of which the water flowed in the wilderness, the rock of our salvation. King David would say, “The Lord is my Rock...” (2 Samuel 22:2) when all his enemies had been defeated. That would be the song he sang in Psalm 18:2.

In the Gospels we find many people followed Jesus until he called them to die to themselves, to follow him to a cross so that they might find life. When people realized being a Christian would cost them something, they walked away from Jesus. It is in the midst of that scene that we have this exchange between Peter and Jesus.

15 “But what about you?” [Jesus] asked. “Who do you say I am?”

16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

17 Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. (Matthew 16:15-18)

What Jesus was saying here was that the faith of Peter, to believe Jesus was who he claimed to be, the Messiah, the Christ, the Saviour, this faith in Jesus lands us on the rock, and on that rock of faith in Jesus he would build His church.

This morning, I do not know what you are facing, but can I tell you with full assurance that there is a rock – a firm place to stand upon. That secure place is found in Jesus. Even when you are anxious at three in the morning for the health of your spouse he is still the rock. He was the

One I could cry out to, the One I knew was in the car with me as well as in the hospital with Lise. I knew He had everything in control, no matter how out of control I felt.

Jesus is our rock. The waves of despair, sickness, doubt, fear, anger, pain may crash over us but we will not be swept away because we are standing on a rock – our feet are on a firm place, and that place is found in Jesus. As I think of the waves crashing around me, though my feet are firmly planted by faith in Jesus, I like something to hold on to. And I could not help but see the cross, the “emblem of suffering and shame,” yes, but also the symbol of Christ’s great love for us. On that cross “he sealed my pardon: paid the debt and set me free.”

The Psalmist suggests that this rescue of God should form a song in our hearts, a new song of praise. It may be a song we sing aloud, like the great hymns and choruses of the church. Or it may simply be the telling of our story of God’s rescue to others. It is a melodic story of God’s grace and help. And when others hear it, the Psalmist says, “many will see and fear the Lord, and put their trust in him” (v. 3).

Are you a Christian today? Have you repented of your sin and asked God to forgive you as you put your faith in the completed work Jesus did for you on the cross of Calvary? Then you have been lifted out of the slimy pit of sin and put on the solid ground of salvation through Jesus Christ. If you have never given your life to Jesus, there is a hand extended to you today ready to lift you out of your pit. It is the hand of Jesus.

Charles H. Gabriel wrote the wonderful words of a hymn simply entitled, “He Lifted Me.”

In loving-kindness Jesus came,  
My soul in mercy to reclaim,  
And from the depths of sin and shame  
Through grace He lifted me.

- *Refrain:*  
From sinking sand He lifted me,  
With tender hand He lifted me;  
From shades of night to plains of light,  
Oh, praise His Name, He lifted me!

This morning as we come to the Lord’s table we are reminded that Jesus lifted us out of sin through His death and resurrection. And when we find ourselves in pits of trouble and despair, He will lift us up again. Why? Because “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

So prepare to come to the Lord’s Table with Thanksgiving this morning. Let the words of the song we sing be your song: “For all that you’ve done we will Thank You!”