

“Psalms for Living”
September 7, 2025

Isaiah 38:16-20
Psalm 6
Colossians 1:15-29

This morning I’m concluding my series of sermons on the Psalms. As a springboard for these sermons, I’ve used the album by Paul Simon from a couple of years ago, *Seven Psalms*. Over seven Sundays, we’ve listened to Simon’s music before worship.

When I started this, I said that I intended to make the sermons more about the Psalms than about Simon—and I think I’ve done that. Last Sunday, I didn’t mention him at all!

But this morning I want to start with an interview that Simon did when his album was released. The interview title stated: “Paul Simon doesn’t want you to think his album is about dying.”

You know, I think it kind of is.

When I first heard the opening words: “I’ve been thinking about the great migration/Noon and night they leave the flock,” I naively thought this was a song about birds. After further listening, I’m convinced it’s about something entirely different. Young and old, we know how friends, family, and the familiar take their leave.

When Simon sings of “two billion heartbeats and out,” well, that seems to speak of life...and death.

And *Seven Psalms* ends with Simon crying, “Wait,” even as he tells us

Life is a meteor
Let your eyes roam
Heaven is beautiful
It's almost like home
Children! Get ready
It's time to come home

The meteoric speed of life calls us to keep our eyes open so that we can take it all in. Yet even with our eyes wide open, we often sense there is a faint song in the background, slowly getting louder: “Children get ready/It’s time to come home.”

Seven Psalms is about dying, yes.

But it’s also about living—as are the Psalms of the Bible and, really, all of scripture.

In the face of death, we live.

Each day we live standing up to death.

Several Psalms echo those words of King Hezekiah arguing with God: “The grave cannot thank you, death cannot praise you.” We heard that when we read Psalm 6 together: “In death there is no remembrance of you; in the grave who can give you praise?”

When illness is great, when our bodies are frail, when death looms, the words of scripture find an echo in the poet who encourages us to “Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”

“Wait!”

My hand's steady
My mind is still clear

And, besides, no one who is dead can show up at worship. There are no hymnals in the grave. Certainly, our living must be to God’s advantage.

Maybe you remember that line from *Six Feet Under*. One person asks: “Why do people have to die?” The response? “To make life important. None of us know how long we’ve got. Which is why we have to make each day matter.”

Or as another person put it: “The shock of death exists to teach us that our first decision is to commit ourselves to an ethical world, a civilized existence, a moral order. You have to ask yourself, am I an ethical person, first and foremost, always and with no exceptions?”ⁱ

The worship of God that is our very living involves us in seeking the good, in loving our neighbors as ourselves, in valuing the image of God in each human being.

In recent years, tech billionaires—Jeff Bezos, Peter Thiel, Elon Musk, and the like—have reportedly been seeking to extend their life-spans or even achieve “eternal life” through anti-aging research, various therapeutics, and extreme lifestyle changes. This past week, a hot mic caught Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping discussing organ transplants as a way to longevity and even immortality.

At some point, all of these people are in for a big surprise.

I worry that this quest for immortality is a way of avoiding the ethical demands that mortality puts on us. This is why I chose to talk about death on a beautiful, late-summer Sunday. This is why I think it’s important for people of all ages to think with me about death morning.

So that we will be better equipped for living the kind of lives that are necessary in our times.

How we live is important. We see this in stark relief every day. Because we know that life is short, we also come to an awareness of, as one person put it, “how little we ultimately lose from risking everything.” *Because* life is short, we can trust in the goodness, the value of life.

Such trust is fading, however, and being replaced by a growing nihilism. In our nation and around the world, an increasing number of people see little good in anything. Their answer is to tear everything down, to destroy the norms and institutions that, flawed as they might be, have endured because they sustain humankind.

Thinking about the danger that nihilism poses to our nation and our world, I remembered that sad and, well, frightening story about the president. In 1989, when Donald Trump was 43, three of his young employees died in a helicopter crash on the way to Atlantic City.

A tragedy like that “can have two effects,” Mr. Trump told Larry King the following year. “You can cherish life more because of it, or it can have the tendency to cheapen it. And unfortunately, [life] cheapened a little bit for me, because these were three incredible people to die like this.”

For a man so rich, life got cheaper.

A few years after that, when asked how he handles stress, Trump replied: “I try and tell myself it doesn’t matter. Nothing matters. If you tell yourself it doesn’t matter — like you do shows, you do this, you do that, and then you have earthquakes in India where 400,000 people get killed. Honestly, it doesn’t matter.”ⁱⁱ

The Psalms, our faith, our lives all tell us: It does matter. Even in the face of tragedy and unexplainable loss and deep sorrow we can still choose the good and cherish life all the more.

For the religious person, the awareness that life is brief leads to the sense that the life worth living calls us at times to take action with no guarantee other than the love of God.

Wait!

It’s not over.

We’re not done.

The dorm room poster tells us: “When you come to the end of your rope—tie a knot and hang on.” When we’ve reached the end of our rope—even when our strength for hanging on is gone—in love for us, the Sovereign God does not let go.

This is the message that comes to us today: Do not give in.

Your life and what you do with it, how each of us lives in the years we have—all of this is of great and lasting significance. Do not give up on the good and valuable work that you are doing and that God is doing through you.

We’re helped in our understanding of this Psalm by another hymn, written centuries later.

Trying to express just who the risen Christ is, Paul quotes a hymn that was already in use among Christians by the middle of the first century. Within twenty or thirty years of the death and resurrection of Jesus, Christians were singing the words that we heard this morning, announcing that in Christ all things hold together and that through Christ God was pleased to reconcile to God all things, by making peace.

Our ability to act in world of opposition and nihilism rises from God’s vindication of the suffering and death of Jesus in the resurrection. There, we see by faith that even at the moment of great suffering and death, God was at work bringing life—and by that same faith claiming that God continues to do so today.

The power of the resurrection takes us into the suffering of the world—into place we would not enter on our own. On our own we would seek our comfort and disregard the hurting world. Left to ourselves we *do* seek simply our own comfort in the midst of a broken world. Knowing Christ as the Risen One gives us not just the courage but the ability to enter the places of suffering to offer the healing, the peace, the wholeness that God seeks for all creation.

That ancient Christian hymn, this morning's Psalm—and all those Psalms that have confronted us in recent weeks—all invite us to step back a little bit from the news of the world, the busyness of our lives, and all that is worrying and wearying and look at a much grander sight: God's love for us in our mortal lives that does endure into God's eternity.

And having seen a love that is stronger than death, we can reenter the world once more with greater strength, so that we might better live in this world.

ⁱ Peter Koestenbaum, *Fast Company*, January 2002, pg. 29.

ⁱⁱ Dan Zak, "It doesn't matter." "We'll see." The Trump Doctrine is sounding more fatalistic every day. *Washington Post*, 10/18/18 https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/it-doesnt-matter-well-see-the-trump-doctrine-is-sounding-more-fatalistic-every-day/2018/10/18/218d3b8a-d14d-11e8-83d6-291fcedad2ab1_story.html?utm_term=.cb727d0ec7c9