

# Gettysburg United Methodist Church

March 25, 2020

## *Psalm 27:1-5, 14*

*Of David.*

<sup>1</sup> *The Lord is my light and my salvation—  
whom shall I fear?*

*The Lord is the stronghold of my life—  
of whom shall I be afraid?*

<sup>2</sup> *When the wicked advance against me  
to devour me,*

*it is my enemies and my foes  
who will stumble and fall.*

<sup>3</sup> *Though an army besiege me,  
my heart will not fear;*

*though war break out against me,  
even then I will be confident.*

<sup>4</sup> *One thing I ask from the Lord,  
this only do I seek:*

*that I may dwell in the house of the Lord  
all the days of my life,*

*to gaze on the beauty of the Lord  
and to seek him in his temple.*

<sup>5</sup> *For in the day of trouble*

*he will keep me safe in his dwelling;*

*he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred  
tent*

*and set me high upon a rock.*

<sup>14</sup> *Wait for the Lord;*

*be strong and take heart*

*and wait for the Lord.*

It is our hope to mail a devotional letter to our members and friends during the time that worship services are suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic. This is the first of what we hope will be only a few. They will be mailed weekly unless there are additional restrictions on travel that limit access to the church office.

## Meditation

Read Joshua 1:1-9

God's people were facing something new. They were about to enter the Promised Land after wandering for forty years in the wilderness. It should have been a time of excitement (and it was), but it was also a time of fear and anxiety. Things were going to change. No more peace and quiet. No more free food to eat (manna and quail). No more pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. Instead there would be people to conquer, battles to fight, rivers to cross, and land to claim. It would be a time of testing for them, as well as for their leader, Joshua.

We are facing something new and unpredictable today—indeed there's something new and unpredictable every day, given the current pandemic situation. For us, of course, it's different from the way it was for Joshua and his people. The times we face are potentially filled with nothing but unpleasant changes, at least for the near future. Businesses are closed, there are empty shelves at the grocery store, COVID-19 seems to be spreading exponentially; no one knows what may come next.

God showed his people a way forward in Joshua's day, and he provides a way forward for us as well. Most importantly, God reminded Joshua and the people that he would be with them always. He

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# God is always with us.

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promised Joshua that “as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you or forsake you.” (Josh. 1:5b) God has always been with his people. God freed them from slavery, led them across the Red Sea, and brought them safely through the wilderness. God provided food and water for them in the desert. Even when they sinned greatly, and worshiped the golden calf, God listened to Moses’ plea to forgive them. God promised to be with them every step of the way as they entered the land of Canaan, just as he had been with them as they escaped from Egypt.

God is always with us. Remember that Jesus is called Emmanuel, which means ‘God with us’. Jesus is our Good Shepherd. He walks by our side even as we journey through the darkest valley. Remember how Jesus was with you when you faced trying times in the past. Remember how he was there for you, how he brought you through, and how he pro-



vided a way forward when there seemed to be no way. Remember the comfort of his presence, the strength of his love, and the way he sustained you through the love of others. Remember the words of Jesus from Matt. 28:20b, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Jesus is with us now as we go through these difficult times. We feel his presence in our hearts, especially when we turn to him in prayer. We feel his grace through the love and support of our family and friends. We find peace as we cast our cares and burdens on him. Even if we don’t feel his presence, we know that he is there; we walk by faith, not by sight. The Good Shepherd is always with us.

And God shows Joshua the attitude God’s people should have as they go forward to face the unknown. He tells them to “be strong and courageous.” (Josh. 1:6a) God understands that they will endure many trials. They’ll cross the Jordan River during flood stage, they’ll confront the walls of Jericho, and at Ai they’ll face the consequences of yielding to temptation. God will be with them, but it won’t be easy. They’ll need to turn to God for the strength and courage that will take them through. They’ll need to be strong and courageous.

I believe God asks us to have that same attitude as we face the coronavirus. We may have some difficult times ahead. God will be with us, but it won’t be easy. We don’t know what the future holds any more than Joshua did. God calls us to be strong and courageous, and we find our strength and courage in him. We place our trust in the Lord, for we know that he will bring us through. We live in hope, knowing that God will be with us no matter what.

That doesn’t mean that we don’t use our common sense. We heed the advice of experts to stay at home and practice “social distancing”, but we don’t do so out of fear. We do so out of love and compassion for others who might be affected. We seek to find a balance between over-reacting (perhaps hoarding or panicking) and under-reacting (perhaps denying that

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# Be strong and courageous.

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the problem is real). We face reality with the confidence that God is with us, and that he will make us strong and courageous.

Someday we'll look back on these times with a better perspective. We'll remember how God brought us through. We'll be thankful that now our faith is stronger, and that we can face future challenges with even more courage and trust in God. We'll praise God for his faithfulness as we remember that his love and grace did not fail during these days.

We live in challenging times, but we know that God will bring us through. He will bless us, and use us to bring blessings to others. Be strong and courageous, for Jesus is with you now and always, to the very end of the age.



## Prayer

Lord Jesus, you promise to be with us always, even to the end of the age. Grant us a sense of your presence and love. Help us to know that we are surrounded by your grace. Make us strong and courageous that we may live in hope during these times of challenge.

We pray your special blessing on all who are affected by the coronavirus. For those who are sick, we ask healing and strength. For their families, we pray for the gift of hope. For medical and emergency workers, people who keep grocery shelves stocked, and all others who help in this time of need, we pray your blessing.

Draw us ever closer to your heart. Teach us to love others as you have loved us; for this we pray in your name. Amen.



# HYMN

## *Leave It There*

by Charles Albert Tindley

If the world from you withhold of its silver and its gold,  
And you have to get along with meager fare,  
Just remember, in his Word, how he feeds the little bird -  
Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there.

Refrain:

Leave it there, leave it there,  
Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there;  
If you trust and never doubt, he will surely bring you out.  
Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there.

If your body suffers pain and your health you can't regain,  
And your soul is almost sinking in despair,  
Jesus knows the pain you feel, he can save and he can heal --  
Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there. [Refrain]

When your enemies assail and your heart begins to fail,  
Don't forget that God in heaven answers prayer;  
He will make a way for you and will lead you safely through -  
Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there. [Refrain]

When your youthful days are gone and old age is stealing on,  
And your body bends beneath the weight of care,  
He will never leave you then, he'll go with you to the end -  
Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there. [Refrain]

Charles Albert Tindley was born in MD in 1851. His father was a slave, but his mother was free. In his youth he moved to Philadelphia and worked for a while as the janitor at Calvary Methodist Episcopal Church. He studied for the ministry, and was ordained in the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1902 he returned as Pastor to the church he had once served as janitor. During his pastorate, the church grew to a membership of over 7,000, and (over his protests) it was renamed the Tindley Temple Methodist Church in his honor .

His hymn *Leave It There* reminds us that Jesus is always there for us, and will carry our burdens if only we leave them with him. I think it speaks well to us as we cope with our current situation. It may be found as no. 522 in our *United Methodist Hymnal*.

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in Gettysburg. Her address there is

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