

"These Lives Are Precious"

Week 1

Prelude

You could create a visual loop with meditative instrumental music that settles the eye and the ear–see more about this in the Music Document.

Welcome & Announcements

[Welcome, announcements and then introduce the people to this new series]

We begin a new worship series today that we pray will bring a "breather" and a sense of assurance to us all. Life is a series of exclamations from "O No!" to "Help!" to "Oh Yeah!" We can swing between disappointment, helplessness, and gratitude on a daily basis. The Book of Psalms knows all about this. Written over a span of time from exile and isolation to the rebuilding of the community, the poetry of the Psalms will accompany us in this series, reminding us that through it all, we can trust that God is, indeed, holding our lives.

This worship will allow us to simplify and slow down for a time. We will lean on prayer, reflection and sharing with one another.

Threshold

"God is Holding Your Life"

[video in the downloads, ready for your own VoiceOver]

We do not live in a land ruled by Kings, as the hearers of our first Psalm of this series did. Nevertheless, the petitions of the psalmist for justice, deliverance, defense of the poor and oppressed, and peace for all peoples is an undergirding theme of our faith. We

are reminded that a just society is one that proclaims “these lives are precious” and worthy of protection. God, indeed, is holding our lives. Let this *be* our “epiphany” in this new year.

Lift up your eyes, behold the hills.
From where will help and rescue come?
We call the One who made the earth,
Who bless’d the stars, the moon and sun.

God is holding your life
God is holding your life
God is holding your life, we believe
[repeat refrain]

Opening Collect Prayer

Leader: Holy and Just God,
You have shown us what is right and good.
Open us this day to a vision of the world made all-right
so that we might follow your ways and know the peace of your reign
on earth as it is in heaven.
***People:* We praise you for your steadfast presence,**
holding our lives together in love.
Amen.

[insert hymn/song here for longer service if you so choose]

Psalm Reading
Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14
Lukan Psalter translation
[link if NRSV is preferred]

O God, give your anointed one your judgment—
and your justice.
Teach your chosen one to govern your people rightly
and bring justice to the oppressed.

The mountains will bring the people peace
and the little hills bring justice!
Your anointed will defend the oppressed
among the people,
save the children of the poor,
and crush the oppressor.

The reign of your anointed will endure
as long as the sun and moon—
throughout all generations.

The rule of the chosen one will be
like rain coming down on the meadow,
like showers watering the earth.
Justice will flower through the days,
and abundance of peace 'til the moon
shall be no more.

Tarshish and the Isles will offer gifts;
Arabia and Sheba will bring tribute.
All rulers will pay homage,
and all the nations will serve your anointed.

Your anointed will rescue the poor
when they cry out,
and the oppressed when there is no
one to help them.

Your chosen one will take pity on the lowly
and the poor,
and will save their lives.

Your chosen one
will rescue them all from violence
and oppression,
and will treat their blood as precious.

Psalm Song

In this series we have have a guest composer. Richard Bruxvoort Colligan is a modern-day interpreter of the Psalms–a "psalmist." As in our theme song written by Richard, "God is Holding Your Life," his songs have easy-to-sing choruses that help bring the seminal message into our voices and hearts. In this one, the chorus is "these lives are precious, these lives are precious we know." You will catch on quick. Here is an introduction from Richard and his song interpretation.

Introduction from Richard and Song:
"These Lives are Precious" *[see downloads]*

Reflection

"Reflection" (brief sermon) prompt: This is likely a Psalm written to be repeated at coronations of kings. The attributes of a just and righteous king are listed after the first line indicates that we are about to hear just how the ruler will be judged and by what conditions justice shall be offered back to the king. Goodness begets more goodness. The more we "discover" (epiphany... enlightenment... seeing... gift) the exchange of belovedness and praise between the Holy and creation, the more we live in a state of knowing and accepting our own beloved nature and desire that for all people. Our song video featured images of tender plants that need water and sun to grow. Can we imagine that all people, with their tender hearts, are yearning for such sustenance? That we do? Do we believe that lives are precious and a bit precarious and in need of tender care? How will we live that out this year? Whenever there are necks stepped upon (a line in Richard's song)–whether physically, economically, or socially, the whole society suffers. Let us pray for the kind of "rule" of the land that honors each precious life. And may we know we are loved and called to love in extraordinary ways.

Testimonies of Being Held

This is an opportunity to let people share how they have felt the love and support of others, of God, in this time of pandemic. It can be considered as part of the "sermon time," coming right out of the end of the preacher's reflection. You may choose to ask one person to speak or you may make a collage of short statements from several people (solicit written or video testimonies to weave throughout the series)

Sung Reprise

"God is Holding Your Life"
(refrain only, consider leading a capella)

God is holding your life
God is holding your life
God is holding your life, we believe
[repeat]

"Selah" Moment

Consider a different voice than the preacher for this section:

The Psalms have a repeated direction throughout–the word "Selah." Scholars are not sure exactly what it means. Perhaps because the Psalms were to be used in worship, we can surmise that the word indicates a pause, or an invitation for a musical instrument to be played. In this worship series, we will use an instrumental sound to remind us to take a pause, a breath, and remember that the settling of our hearts can offer the feeling that we are held in the hands of the Divine. We will hear [the sound] and then have some silence. Feel free to close your eyes if you like. Imagine yourself held in safety and love and care. When you hear [the sound] again, open your eyes.

[time of silence bookended with sound "effect"–bell, singing bowl, chime, rainstick, etc. If you choose, use more words to offer a guided visualization of being held. Find free recorded sound effects at https://freesound.org, for example, a singing bowl that has a long reverberation: https://freesound.org/people/enhuber/sounds/400819/]

Silence

Prayers of the People

Each week we will have a moment to write prayer concerns on small pieces of paper. We will then place these prayers in a container *[bowl, box, etc]*–a symbolic action of placing them in God's hands, God's care.

Take a moment to do this. Finish with this response:

Let the people say, "Selah"
Selah!

Then continue with prayers in the familiar way your community prays OR use this intercessory form of prayer:
Let us continue our prayers. I will offer a category of concern and we will allow a brief pause, then we will respond as indicated. As a prayer posture for this worship series, I invite you to cup your hands, ready to receive God's love and peace, and in preparation to be God's love and peace in the world.

Let us pray for the leaders of this world and this church community… *[pause]*
God of Justice, hear our prayer.
Let us pray for those who live in conflict around the world… *[pause]*
Prince of Peace, hear our prayer.
Let us pray for all who are experiencing loss of any kind in this pandemic… *[pause]*
Comforting Healer, hear our prayer.
Let us pray for those who are homeless, hungry and alone… *[pause]*
Emmanuel, God-With-Us, hear our prayer.
Let us pray for those who live in comfort,
for Christ-like hospitality and generosity… *[pause]*
Transforming Spirit, hear our prayer.

[if you are having communion, insert the "Selah" communion prayer here, replacing the next lines with the ones that move to communion]

Holy and Living One,
for those we have named and the ones whose names we do not know,
hear our prayer.
[insert the Lord's Prayer if this is your tradition]

Sung Prayer Response
"Put Peace Into Each Other's Hands"
https://www.hopepublishing.com/find-hymns-hw/hw2996.aspx
Hear a version of this song HERE
Or use our video download (you must have a OneLicense.net *license for this piece)*

[sung]
Put peace into each other's hands
and like a treasure hold it,
protect it like a candle flame,
with tenderness enfold it.

Put peace into each other's hands
with loving expectation;
be gentle in your words and ways,
in touch with God's creation.

[music continues to underscore]

The Peace
The Peace of Christ be with you.
And also with you.

Will you make a gesture of extending your cupped hands toward others who may be with or near you as a sign of offering the peace that Christ gives us. If you are alone, place your cupped hands over your heart, as a sign that you send your heartfelt peace out to the world.

[after a moment, continue with this verse]
Give thanks for strong yet tender hands
held out in trust and blessing.
Where words fall short let hands speak out;
the heights of love expressing.

Benediction

Now go in the knowledge that
God is holding your life
even as we hold each other.
You are not alone.
You are loved.
Amen.

[insert closing Hymn/Song for longer service]

Postlude

