



The Westminster Pulpit

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“Forever of Nows” **Sermon on Psalm 89**

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We just sang Hymn 67, which is based on Psalm 89. “My song forever shall record the tender mercies of the Lord; your faithful love will I proclaim, and every age shall know your name.” We sang the psalm; now hear the words again.

Psalm 89: 1-4, 15-18

I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens. You said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to my servant David, ‘I will establish your descendants forever and build your throne for all generations.’”

Happy are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O LORD, in the light of your countenance; they exult in your name all day long and extol your righteousness. For you are the glory of their strength; by your favor, our horn is exalted. For our shield belongs to the LORD, our king to the Holy One of Israel.

“I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever.” “Forever and ever.” This week, I’ve put some thought into the word “forever,” and I have come to the conclusion that “forever” is a very long time. (Your Generosity dollars at work!)

I remember the seminary professor who described forever as a mountain of solid granite, and once a day, an eagle passing on some draft of wind, would brush the tip of its wing against the granite wall. Every day, brush. Brush. Brush. Well, the time it would take for that eagle’s wing to wear that mountain down into dust, the professor said, “That’s just one day in forever.”

In other words, the human mind cannot comprehend the size of “forever.” So it is that we make the word smaller.

For example, while many of you are at the beach or in the mountains, enjoying family and friends, I'm at that stoplight right out there. I've been there forever!

Forever is not for everyone. I watch cars in front of me turning left. Those who just give up on forever, wait until the coast is clear and then make a left on red, completely breaking the law. But the driver surely must see the length of time there as a crime against humanity, and so they take the law into their own hands. Or, as the Judges of the Bible said, "All the people did what was right in their own eyes." Anarchy on the corner of Mayfair and West End! And that gets us back to the point.

"I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever." Who amongst us has the time for forever? "With my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations."

None of this is true. We don't have a "forever" bone in our body. And proclaiming your faithfulness to all generations? Impossible, and getting harder and harder every day.

I listened to a portion of a podcast my seminary put out, featuring Dr. Lisa Miller, a professor of Psychology and Education at Columbia in NYC. She spoke about how "proclaiming your faithfulness to all generations is coming to an end."

She said, "We have high school and college students who may have never prayed by the side of a parent or a grandparent. Who might never have read any sacred text, doesn't feel at home in a house of worship. We have a rising generation with an unformed spiritual core. There is a spiritual atrophy at the center of the whole person." And now, get this, she says, "When we look at the data in top peer review journals, this spiritual atrophy is primarily responsible for the mental health crises." She said, "It's not that we get depressed and stop going to houses of worship. It's not that we get anxious and stop praying. It's the opposite! These young people are depressed because they don't go to houses of worship. They are anxious because they don't pray."

I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever. I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

A high school student who says, "Yes, I turn to God for guidance in times of difficulty," is 80 percent less likely to become addicted, 75 percent less likely to have depression, 82 percent less likely to commit suicide. There is nothing that compares. It's not 100 percent, but Dr. Miller said, "We are built to be spiritually alive."

Psalms 89, if we had the time to read it all, I mean I can't go on preaching forever, but if we had the time, it's written by someone who needed a "win."

You know the prayer... "Lord, I need..." "Dear Lord, I want..." "Dear Lord, if you could just help..." Sometimes we need a "win." Unfortunately, for so many it is that our culture tells us that if you try out for the team, and don't make it, you can't play. Give it up. That's not our song.

The culture says that if the prodigal came back home, he'd find the house empty because Dad moved and left no forwarding address. That's not our song. We don't give up. We are not thin-skinned. We are strong.

This Psalmist is telling us that when we need a win, we sing more loudly. We sing of God's steadfast love - forever. In other words, we embody the God descriptors in ourselves. We become the ones who shine with steadfast love. We are the ones who maintain faith forever.

None of this "Remember we are dust and to dust we shall return." Nothing mortal about this. Look, I'm faithful. You be faithful. The Psalmist says, "God, do you remember those festal processions? When everyone came out into the streets and praised your name, lifted your name on high. Did you like that? It could happen again! In fact, I'll get the song started! Does that sound like someone who's depressed to you? Anxious? Alone? We are not "one strike, you're out" people. We don't give up on one another. We don't give up on God. Even when things are tough.

"O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water, so I have looked upon you..." (*Psalm 63*)

When times are tough, we don't conform to look like a miserable day. We have been transformed by the renewing of our minds. We are the light of the world. We shine. We love. We reconcile!

It drove the Roman Empire crazy. They tried to kill it. It just kept coming back stronger because the steadfast love of God is forever and ever and is that for which we thirst. It is our human condition. It is wired in our souls. It's living water. It is for everyone.

I'm going to sing of God's steadfast love, now, and now, and now and now, and now... that's what steadfast love is, it's just a strong of "nows" that go on forever and ever.

You see, he doesn't get mired in anxiety and depression. I'm going to sing of your steadfast love now for all generations. We should try this!

Next time you feel some road rage, roll down your window and say, "Hey, Buddy! I'm going to sing of God's steadfast love for you! I love you! God loves is so big! God loves us all. I'm going to tell of God's faithfulness forever." See if that doesn't change you!

This is what we believe. We believe in big things. "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord, forever and ever." That's a big thing.

"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven..." Big things. "O for a thousand tongues to sing..." That's a big thing. "When we've been there 10,000 years bright shining as the sun, we know best days to sing God's praise then when we first begun." It's big! And we have to get up to big. We need to start our forevers now.

Earlier this spring, the staff of this congregation met up on a mountain top. We were supposed to have our retreat in February, but we had the ice storm. We had to come to this frozen, dark Sanctuary and do a worship service. It reminded me again of those Covid days, and boy, my heart was alive! And it took our whole season of all that we had planned and threw it all away! And so later on we had our retreat, and we were a little frustrated because all those plans got shelved; we didn't get what we wanted. Now what do we want? And those around the circle said, "We want us all to be together. We want us all to know the words, to sing in unison. We want to put the "discipline" back in "disciple." To build the muscle, the muscle of steadfast love. To quit swimming against the reconciliation of all things, and being angry and

mad, and swimming with it. Because it's big! To start to move ourselves away from all that divides, provides anxiety and lacks hope, and move to things that are eternal.

So, next fall we are going to begin working with theme, "Taste and See" that is based on a psalm. "Taste and see that the Lord is good." We will start to sing that song together! One of the ways we're going to taste and see together is that we will urge one another to expand our ministries. If you've gone to church all your life, that's great. But do you make room to pray every day?

Can you start a "now" that will last forever? In all the things we have to do to make memories, can you make a memory out of a verse of scripture? I know we're all about memories, but can you make eternal memories just by memorizing a scripture? Commit yourself to a verse a day. Here's an easy one: "This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." Say it in the morning when you're sipping your coffee. Do it every day as you're eating your bagel for lunch, "This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." And when you go to bed, the last thing you say may be, "This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." No matter what the day was – good, bad, hard or easy – we're in it for the long haul, forever.

Do you understand? We have a job to do.

A high school student who says, "Yes, I turn to God for guidance in times of difficulty," is 80 percent less likely to become addicted, 75 percent less likely to have depression, and 82 percent less likely to commit suicide. There's nothing that compares. Nothing else comes close. We are built to be spiritually aware. Salvation is at hand!

So, right now, I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. And we'll see if we can't get some wins. Let's start now. Forever.

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