

Creation – Mountains  
Psalm 125  
Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost  
September 9, 2018  
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Psalm 125 (NRSC) The Security of God's People

**A Song of Ascents.**

<sup>1</sup> Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion,  
which cannot be moved, but abides forever.

<sup>2</sup> As the mountains surround Jerusalem,  
so the LORD surrounds his people,  
from this time on and forevermore.

<sup>3</sup> For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest  
on the land allotted to the righteous,  
so that the righteous might not stretch out  
their hands to do wrong.

<sup>4</sup> Do good, O LORD, to those who are good,  
and to those who are upright in their hearts.

<sup>5</sup> But those who turn aside to their own crooked ways  
the LORD will lead away with evildoers.  
Peace be upon Israel!

You've probably heard the saying "*you never get a second chance to make a first impression.*"

We know that good beginnings are critical to overall success.

For the next few weeks we're going to use a Creation theme, for a season, and since it all started with "*In the beginning*" we can be sure that God wanted to make a GREAT first impression!

Genesis 1 and 2 help us to understand that God is good, creative, active, loving, and resourceful.

We also we learn about our world. That it's good, connective, full of life, pleasing to the eye, and good for us.

And, we learn about ourselves...that we're made in God's image; we have God's breath; we're creative; and we are caretakers.

In these chapters, we see God building a system and that “the next day” builds on the one before with order and connection.

Each day is good in itself. PERIOD.

It’s not good based on the day before or after.

It’s not good because it’s leading up to the creation of human beings.

It’s good because it’s God’s...just what God created it to be.

For six days, God created something out of nothing.

AND THEN: on the seventh day, God created **nothing** out of something.

God labored for six days and on the seventh day, God created rest.

It was in God’s plan and preparation.

See, just like the preparation we have FOR a harvest, the preparation for God’s REST is where we can see the end of one cycle and the beginning of the next, and we’re filled for the work that’s to come.

While we were in Europe I read a book called Someone Like You about the prophet Elijah, and I was reminded again about mountains and how important they are in Creation and in the Bible.

When we pay attention to the number of times a mountains are mentioned in Scripture, we can see that God likes to do business on mountains.

- Mt. Ararat is the mountain where Noah and the Ark landed after the flood and Noah saw the rainbow of God’s promise.
- It’s on Mt. Moriah that God provided Abraham with a ram to replace sacrificing Isaac.
- God, as a burning bush, called Moses on Mt. Horeb.
- Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai and got a glimpse of the Promised Land from Mt. Pisgah.
- Then, there’s Mt. Carmel (finally an Elijah reference) where **he** proved to the people that his God is the one true God.
- And it was probably Mt. Hermon where Jesus was transfigured and showed the glory of God to some of his disciples.

- We also know that Jesus prayed on the Mt. of Olives....and that he was crucified on Mt. Golgatha.
- And, in Revelation, The Lamb of God stands on Mt. Zion.

I think we **can** say that God means business on mountain tops; they're a kind of halfway point between heaven and earth, where God meets and does business with humanity.

We could be a little prejudiced, living in the shadow of Pikes Peak; we're spoiled in Colorado!

And if you've driven, hiked, ridden a train, biked, or navigated to the top (or close to) of any mountain and looked out at the majesty of creation from there, you might have felt like you, too, have done business with God.

Today's Scripture reading is regarded as a "song of ascent" probably sung as pilgrims walked up the hill into Jerusalem for feast days and to worship at The Temple.

The psalmist created movement up the mountain.

Mt. Zion is a whopping 2500 feet above sea level, but, we're drawn, in the words of the psalmist, closer to God.

Remember, it's in Revelation, where the Lamb of God, standing on the same Mt. Zion, points to the ultimate destination for those who are faithful, a place that cannot be shaken and that endures forever.

Mt. Zion is symbolic in Scripture as a place of God's help.

It's referenced in several psalms, and it's not even the highest mountain around. I learned (Google search) that Mt. of Olives lies to the east.

To the north is Mt. Scopus; to the west and south are other hills and mountains **all** higher than Zion. These mountains surround and rise above, in all directions, serving as fortification for Mt. Zion.

These mountains surround Jerusalem and offer security, just as the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse of this psalm suggests: the Lord surrounds his people, providing security, now and forevermore.

As stewards of Creation – that’s the job we’ve been given since Genesis – we’re aware of irresponsible practices that take resources from mountains and destroy ecosystems; killing everything living there. Sometimes mountains are literally blow up so that the lucrative resources can be plowed out with a bulldozer.

For those of us who have studied the Social Principles of the UMC, we know that our denomination is active legislatively and financially to find ways to harvest resources (like coal) but not be so destructive to the environment and the people around the mines. ‘Cause once the mountains are disrupted with TNT, the leftovers get piled back on top to “look like” a mountain or are used to fill in the valleys. Either way, when rain falls on those areas, it leeches toxins that are carried into the water supply and people (real people) drink it and studies show that those toxins cause birth defects prevalent in children born around mountaintop removal coal sites.

You may not know, but the UMC has permanent mission posts in eastern Kentucky around such areas. The mining companies don’t have much concern for what’s being left behind in places like Red Bird Mission (which our Dorothy Circle supports) to care for the residents of rural Appalachia.

We must be better stewards of our mountains!

And there are other mountain verses in the Bible.

We know, from Matthew’s gospel, that faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains, but the Apostle Paul reminds us that even if we have faith that can move mountains, if we do not have love, then we have nothing (1 Cor 13:2.)

Think of it like this: faith lived out in love is the only thing that **should** move mountains.

There’s also an OT prophecy from Isaiah 40 where we read of a time when “mountains will be laid low and valleys lifted up.”

Those Appalachian coal mines are a modern-day living out of this prophecy!

I think that if we lose these places where God can do business with us, then we become more disconnected from God.

The song “America the Beautiful” speaks of “purple mountain majesties” and it’s hard to look at our Peak or any other mountain, monuments of God’s creation, and not be inspired.

‘Cause we can stand on top of a mountain, look out, and have encounters with God. Scripture is consistent: God does business on mountains.

We may not have day-to-day experiences with what it means to do social or environmental justice about coal mining, but when we study Scripture, there IS strong theological symbolism in mountains.

We often refer to our “mountain-top experiences.”

Jesus retreated to a mountain to pray and be near God.

And I truly believe, in light of the way mountains are used in Scripture, it would make sense, that God did business with sin and death on a mountain where Jesus was crucified.

Scholars can’t agree to the exact location of Mt. Golgotha, but some believe it’s near or on Mt. Moriah....or just north of Mt. Zion; both sites are relatively close to the area outside the Temple gates and Golgotha, we know, was elevated, so it could be visible from a great distance.

Mt. Golgotha helps us understand that God loves us and likes to do business on mountains!

Beautiful vistas can be places where we’re open to God’s presence.

Yet, as Psalm 125 alludes, even up there we’re not immune from temptations, and sin or unfaithfulness.

We need Mt. Golgatha!

Today’s psalm highlights God’s protection.

It speaks about how the mountains (or hills) protect Jerusalem from invasion.

And that the people can trust God's protection, even in the presence wickedness.

Psalm 125 also encourages trust and faithfulness to God, even when evil is present.

The first verse says: *"Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever."*

Mt. Zion is where God's temple was built in Jerusalem and strong mountains surround it.

In a similar way, God is present with us and God's love surrounds us.

Every one of us, who trusts in God, can stay calm, and steady, and peaceful.

Trusting God helps us to keep going the way we should.

Another "mountain top" – at least at a higher elevation in our sanctuary – is this Table to remind us how much God loves us. Mt. Golgotha was not a site of defeat but of Christ's victory over sin and death. Let's remember his sacrifice and prepare for Holy Communion.

Will you please join me on page 7 at the front of the hymnal and let's declare our faith in the words of the Apostle's Creed. Will you please stand....