

Calvary United Methodist Church
September 1, 2019

OUR GOD REIGNS
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

Children's Message:

Psalm 18:2

I invite our children to come forth at this time for the children's message. At the first service I just had all adult children, there were no little ones among us. Come on up! Good to have you up here this morning. I invite you watch the screens in the front. They are a little more powerful than the back and you get to see them a little better.

I want to talk about God being our strength and our redeemer: The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge.

How many of you have ever done any rock climbing? Can you look at me? Can you look this way? It helps me a lot. Did you ever climb on rocks? Do you like climbing on rocks? Anyone out there climb on rocks? As a kid I liked it a lot. It's fun because there are just so strong and they take us all kinds of places. So, today I want to talk a little bit about what rocks... when you go to the river do you ever see all kinds of colored rocks?

I mean, all shapes, all sizes, some are smooth, some are rough and they are just quite beautiful. At least I have always enjoyed seeing rocks and some come with a lot of value to them. This is a rock with gold attached to it. You know gold is a pretty expensive mineral and rocks have minerals in them. They have gems and stones and all kinds of things that we use for a variety of things.

Sometimes rocks are very very old and they have...what's this called? Anyone know? It is a specific one, but in generality? When you find something in like a leaf or some other shape in a rock? They are called fossils. And, what it is, it's a part of history. If we could go back hundreds or even millions of years in some cases, when the earth was covered with water and things died and the pressure turned this whatever it was into a fossil.

Sometimes we use rocks for beautiful things. When I walk to the med center a lot of probably children, youth and adults have painted beautiful rocks with sayings on that make people feel better. They are wonderful things.

Have you seen mountains of all rock, like nothing growing on them? Sometimes you go around and you see...this was out in Colorado Springs, the Garden of Gods. It's just these big rocks and people love to climb them, so rocks give us entertainment and they give us fun and they give us things to do.

Rocks also are carved out by nature so they are malleable through time. This is out in Monu-

ment Valley out in Utah and it's again just amazing all the different shapes and sizes rocks could be. This is a ballast rock. And this is a very interesting place. It is in Zimbabwe. I drove probably for a half hour or so, miles and miles, acres and acres of rocks and those rocks are all bigger than pickup trucks. Now it looks...yeah, these aren't little pebbles...and it looks like God sat down some afternoon and thought: I'm just going to make some rock stacks. And He just stacked all these rocks up all over the place. I mean it is a huge rock park that has been there for a long long long long time.

Sometimes you find real big rocks. Sometimes rocks give protection. This is out at Mesa Verde. Some of you have seen some in the corner of New Mexico and it's a place where like 1500 years ago people, native tribes, lived for protection. Again, just rocks are made for fortresses, they are made to keep people safe.

I wonder, how many of you have ever sat around a campfire? Did anyone ever say: hey go get some rocks to throw in the fire to keep us warm? Do we do that? Rocks don't usually burn, do they? There are a few like limestone, but typically you could put a rock in a fire and it is so strong it will take the heat. It might get charred and brown and black, but it will still be a rock.

And then there are these things. Any of you like jewelry, shall I ask? I see smiles. These are just dirty old rocks in the ground until someone takes them and polishes them up and shapes them into something very beautiful.

Rocks are just everywhere. And this was a rock years ago that someone bore a hole in to make an anchor for a boat because rocks...if you don't have an anchor on the boat you would just drift all over the place and sometimes we want to stay anchored.

Rocks: the Lord is my rock, my fortress, my deliverer. My God is my rock in whom I take refuge.

So, when you think of God, He's like that rock over His people. He protects them. He's our anchor to keep us. When everything else is falling apart, He is our anchor. God is beautiful, just like all those gems and all those things that we have. He is strong like the rock to build houses and to build fortresses. Of all things God is for us, He's safety and security. The security of having homes. A lot of them have rock in them at some place or another. And the security that comes from knowing God.

There is a story about Jesus when he picks up a little lost lamb or a lost sheep. When I think of God, I like to think of this: He is secure in the arms. I bet when you were little anyway and you got afraid, you would run to Mom or Dad or someone you trusted and they held you, right? And you feel safe, you feel comfortable, you feel secure and God says: I am your rock. God wants you to know that you are loved, that you are secure and that you are safe and God will always be with all of us at all times.

So, when you see a rock, don't just see a little rock, see all these marvelous things that God has created to remind us that He is our strength.

Thank you for coming up today. God bless your week.

Message:

Psalm 46

I'm not sure where you go to find your peace, but when I am in a still place and you listen to that still small voice of God, sometimes it is peace and other times it is almost haunting as we look over life. Do you ever do that? Do you ever rehearse your past mistakes? Sometimes when I am too quiet, I think of the things I have done and said that I shouldn't have and the things I've left undone and unsaid that I should have as well.

So, these places of peace to me, places of tranquility, sitting under a tree, watching the snow fall, smelling the leaves of fall, are both a time of recharging my battery and a time to say: God, I'm sure glad you are in charge and I am not. Do you ever say thank you that you are not the big cheese of the world? Because God has a lot on God's platter.

The message today has reminded me that I don't have to worry about all the little details of life. God is so graceful that those things I have failed at God says: Jeff, I know better. You can do better the next time. Let's put that behind you and start today with a clean slate.

And that's why God reigns. When we look at our life, we can get very disturbed about the world we live in unless we have Christ, unless we have hope, unless we have a promise for a better tomorrow, I believe.

When we look around and I talk with people today I hear these things: well, I'm so concerned, the economic uncertainty ahead. I don't even know if I want to bring children. Young couples tell me this. I don't know if I want to bring more children into this world.

Folks say: I'm tired of hearing endless wars. You know, if you're under 20 it's now 19 years since all the warring started in Afghanistan and all these places where it's not ended for 20 years and we're not the only place having war.

And we hear the news in the streets that crime is increasing. It reminds me that this month, just 19 years ago, our world, at least my world and much of America changed as we once knew it. We have been paying the price of that kind of freedom ever since, right? Billions if not trillions of dollars for security and we're still not secure.

I had been trained as a disaster person and been around that stuff since I was 14 as a fireman. And for about four months every other week, 9 or 10 times anyway, I went to New York. My second week there I was at Ground Zero and I was listening to policemen and firemen and listening to their stories and later I took groups to feed. I listen to persons who are undocu-

mented, who came in and there was no record of their being around that building as vendors and they couldn't find their bodies and their beings.

We were broken. I don't know if I ever saw a more broken nation at that time and broken people that wondered what will tomorrow look like? When I have lost all that I had, many of those people lost their families, their friends, and our nation lost our security, but there is something grand that came out of that that I would love...I don't want disaster, I don't want war, but our nation turned to God like it hadn't done probably in 100 years, because we were afraid.

Our God reigns. God was here before this. God will be here after us. God always is, but we tend to lose our track in our busyness, in our wealth, in our comfort, because whether we like to hear it again or not, we in America are all those things: we are comfortable and we are wealthy and we live in a land of plenty. It's only in tough times that we really cry out loud: Why me, God? Why are we going through all of this? And it is in prayer that we come to God. God says: I'm so glad to have this time with you.

As parents we love to speak to our children and grandchildren and our family and friends and God is our family. God says: I want nothing more to remind you that I'm reigning, that your worries...turn them to me. Your burdens are heavy, but I will make them light. For I will carry your burdens for you.

I've been trying to share this as we think not only of Moses. Remember? He had that huge burden of taking people from slavery out of Egypt into a land where there was nothing and they complained and God says: Look, I am your God. I will reign. I will provide. And God provided.

If you look, sit at a pond, sit at a tree today, sit by yourself or sit somewhere quiet and say: Where can I see God's hand in my life, you will see God has been there before you every step of the way and in the storms and in the trials and in the tribulations God is there. For God reigns.

I've not seen a lot of war, I've seen some of it. But I've been to Hurricane Andrew in 93 down in Florida where Homestead was gone. It would be like taking Harrisburg and wiping it off the map. There were just slabs of concrete. I've been into the Carolinas and I have seen war in Africa. I have sat with people who have lost everybody of their family, all their friends, their whole villages and they wonder how you go on. We see here in the news from the earthquakes, from the fires, from the tornados, all those things and sooner or later you see them on television: I'm not sure how I would have made it without God. You see, when all else fails, God is. God never fails. God is with us.

And we look to the stories of the Old and the New Testament, of when testimony after another, some of you might remember the story of Daniel in the lion's den. Folks had a real sense

of need in those days. They didn't have the community theaters and IMAX so they had coliseums and they would put people that they didn't like in there and let them fight with lions. Guess who usually lost. And they would have men come after each other with swords until one would kill the other as entertainment. I'm glad I'm not paying for that. Daniel prayed to God and God saved him. It says He closed the mouth of the lions. That's not a story to me, folks, that's a truth. God did it because God reigns.

There is another man named Joseph. His brothers were so tired of hearing him brag about his great life that they threw him in the pit to die because they were sick of him. Not unusual for families not to always get along, until they thought: Geech, here comes a caravan. We can sell him as a slave and make a buck. So they sold him and he was out of the pit and into a palace. God's plan. God reigns. And this man later, years later, when drought hit, he was in a position. He said to his brothers: You meant this for harm, but God had a plan. I'm here to save you today. And he saved them because God reigns.

There is not one life in here that hasn't been touched by cancer. Some of us have lost loved ones and friends to it and others know those who, praise God, have overcome. And when you see them, you won't find any of them that don't at some point say to you: Praise God and the medical advances and the men and women who work so hard to save lives.

As a young boy I wasn't a farmer, but my grandparents were. I would go to the farms and I can remember some of those summer when you get those July-August endless days of lots of sun and no water. I can remember my grandfather in particular and my grandmother following him in prayers at meal times praying that God would send water to the parched land that they might have crops that they might provide for their family and their animals. And around the world people praise God. And when the waters come they seek out God and they say: thanks be to God. We don't understand the plan, but we thank God for providing.

You see, we get so worn down by culture, by society, by news, by television, that we sometimes allow ourselves to be consumed by negative and God says: don't believe it. I'm God. I'm bigger than any problem you will ever face, any failure you've even been a part of creating, God said: We can overcome, put the past behind and go forward.

There are many things that we have tried that control our lives. One of the largest for us is past. I don't think I'm the worst person in the world, nor the best, but I've done stuff and I sometimes: God, why did I do that? Why did I say that? Why did I hurt this person? Why did I do that? And some of that is so many years ago it's like I can't even change it at all, even if it were yesterday. God says: Try to learn from your past. Repent of your past. Try to make a new beginning, be a better person, do the right thing, say the right thing, do the right action the next time. But don't stay in the past. Don't worry so much about other's opinions, some of them aren't even informed opinions, they are just opinions. You know the truth. Live for God.

Sometimes we live in our beliefs and people want to undermine our God. And God says: I'm your rock. I'm your fortress. Don't let anyone put your faith down.

And when it comes to relationships with friends and family and coworkers, it is not easy because we are all different. Then God says: You stand firm. You stand like a rock. You stand on truth. You be faithful to God. You be faithful to what you know is pure and holy and sometimes some of those relationships will have to move on because they are toxic. They are just bad relationships and sometimes it hurts when it is family or friends.

And then there is that thing about money. All of us want more and no matter how much we get, it is never enough. And God says: Don't let it control your lives. Don't worry about it. Don't make it your god. Learn to live within your means. Don't do things that put you into trouble by learning to live in your means because I'm your God and I will care for you. If I care for the birds of the air and the flowers of the fields, God says, I will care for you.

In looking this morning I wanted to think about how God has used all of us. He's planted his soul within us. We are a seed for the good, for the growth of the world and if we plant those seeds, they will grow. And sometimes we wonder, are we making a difference for the Kingdom. So I quick Googled this morning: what is the amount of kernels on an ear of corn? There are 16 rows and up to like 800 kernels from one planted seed. Do you know, I told you a couple weeks in a row, see if you can remember because the first group couldn't. You are what for God? You are a gift. You, my friends, are a gift of God. You have been planted. You are here to make a difference in the world. You are unique. You can touch people, you can say things, you can do things that no one else in this world will ever do because you are a unique gift of God.

And God wants you to know that God is not finished with me or you yet. You are this gift and imagine what it is that you can do if you set yourself free to take on God, all that God wants you to be and do all that God wants you to do.

When those towers when down, America seemed like a crippled nation for a short time and all of a sudden we rose up again. One of the things we did was turn to God and be reminded that God is our strength. Some people wonder why I like the old hymns and I do like the new as well. But I want you to just listen to the title: A Mighty Fortress. We don't need a lot of fortresses around, but it is a protection.

On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand. There are a lot of things I don't understand. We'll Understand it by and by. We don't like the imagery of soldiers, but I want to tell you: do we not have a war on drugs? Do we not have a war on about everything in this country anymore? As Christian soldiers we are constantly going against the enemy. We don't talk about the devil or Satan, but if there is a God there is Satan and if we don't focus on God, we are going to get drawn in to the dark deep darkness. We don't talk about that much anymore, but we need to know it is there and we are marching, we are at battle, we are victors over because of Jesus Christ. That's the claim that is ours because we can trust and we can sing that song

which we just did: It is Well with My Soul.

I invite you to get on the internet if you use it and check out books to read why those songs were written because there is a living testimony of someone who wrote them because of what God did for them in the midst of the troubles they were going through because God reigns. God was their only hope in the time of trial.

There was a great prophet names Jeremiah. He was known as the weeping prophet because he kept trying to tell the people of Israel, the people of God that they needed to come home to God and they were wandering in foreign lands, worshipping foreign gods. And all of a sudden the evil empire of Babylonia came into Judea, took over. He wept because, I can picture it, men, women and children lay slain in the streets. If you have never seen that, you never want to. Lifeless dead bodies slain because of the wickedness. He wept and he said these words: I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him. He is the one who seeks him.

And again: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassion never fails. They are new every morning: great is your faithfulness.

Israel needed to come home to God. We need to come home to God. We need to confess and make right before our God.

When I think of the towers I think: what happened then that we came home to God so much? We were so frightened. I hope it was more than just our comfort. We want peace.

Sometimes we seek this. And may I tell you it won't find peace? Those towers went down in the financial district. The people setting those bombs thought surely that they would end America and break our financial background. You know what people in those financial buildings were doing? Do you remember the phone lines were overpowered that day, people couldn't get through? They were doing this: Honey, I'm not going to make it out of the building. I love you and the children. Did that have anything to do with money? It has everything to do with relationships. The relationship with God: I'll be okay. Remember the flight 93? Let's Roll! I'll be okay. Take care of the family. God is with us.

Folks, we need to come home to God. We need to make it right and home means we become the light. The darkness, the devil that's out there, the satanic, the evil, we see it. We need to be light because Christ says light overcomes all darkness. It will be as nothing.

If God is with us, who could be against us? Who? It's only a few months until Christmas and you remember what it is like in here that night. We shut off the lights and we have one little candle and the world is aflame and you can read and that's what it's like when you, as small as you think you are, go out into the world. There are days God wants to remind us, firstly in our humility, we are the most precious child as if we are the only one on the face of

the earth and humility remember that we are also a speck of sand. Don't forget. But somewhere in between there God says: Realize you are a gift. And because we put our faith in that solid rock, God's...I'm counting on God, but God's counting on us.

God seeks a personal relationship with that you can pray to God and lay down your burdens and your worries and your cares and you can also find strength.

When I was in church camp forever ago, we would often take that little walk up in the mountains and we would lash together little crosses to remind us of the journey that Jesus Christ made. See, our difficult times, life's challenges, are not meant to paralyze us. They are supposed to help us discover who we are. When we made those walks like the people of Israel and like the people, the disciples of Jesus, they are to let me know: who am I to be for the kingdom of God? What are you to do in your family? What are you to be at work? What are you to be with your friends and your neighbors? Where is it that God will use you to bring that light, to bring that kingdom here on earth?

If you were reading the blast this weekend, I told the story of a ship and I never really knew the tale when it always said the captain must go down with the ship. Let me tell you why: the captain is the leader of the ship, the one navigating the ship and their job, their job is if the ship is sinking to give all they have to save every person on that ship, to give their very life if necessary.

Folks, we have someone who is our captain. He did it. He gave his very life on the cross that you and I might have new and abundant life. I sometimes get sad when I hear that story unless I was thinking of this slide: I like Christmas, but boy do I like Easter morning. Boy do I like coming in here and seeing those crosses empty, the tomb empty, to know Jesus isn't in a tomb, he is not dead, he's resurrected. That means every mistake I've made, every sin I've committed, I have new life, I have new opportunity and I have eternal life. Our captain set an example for you and me that we might have new life and give it to others.

It's time for a change in me, that means in you. We are the only thing we can change by the power of God. Wanting to start a new life? We've got it. The slate is clean today. The negativism, the judgements, the criticisms, the ugliness, the unforgiving spirits that we have in family and friends alike. It's time we said: God, make me a light, make me an instrument of your peace. Use me because, God, I want you to reign in my life. And God will give you a peace that passes all understanding.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, you've never left your people down to millennia, Lord. You're always our God and yet we wander freely and your arms are open to take us back home. Today, Lord, we pray that you will receive us again, cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Fill us with your light, that we might be light and hope and peace to the world. We ask in thy Son, Jesus' Holy Name. Amen.