

Sabbath Moments
A Service of Healing and Wholeness

Sunday, May 17, 2009, 6 p.m.
Southport Presbyterian Church
The Toney Chapel

My Refuge, My Shelter...
Psalm 91:1-2

***He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."***

Thousands of years ago, God acted to provide refuge for those in need when he established six cities of refuge. These were cities to which someone in trouble could run for protection. The residents of the cities of refuge had an obligation to protect and shelter the one in trouble. God offers refuge and as the Body of Christ so must we.

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Physical refuge shelters the frightened. Many people simply need a safe place, a place of physical safety. Both children and adults may find themselves in places where they are not safe. Physical refuge for your safety was God's idea thousands of years ago.

Emotional refuge shelters the hurting. The causes of emotional pain and distress are many. As the Body of Christ, we must not make hurting people feel inadequate or unwelcome by suggesting that Christians are always joy-filled, hearty, and courageous. Our common humanity calls us to empathy and kindness. At some time in our lives, all of us will need emotional shelter; we need to provide a refuge for the hurting.

Spiritual refuge shelters the burdened. A surprising number of visitors to church have described their first attempt to visit us on a Sunday morning. They drive into the parking lot and find that they can't get out of their cars. Spiritually burdened, they are unsure that it's safe here, unsure that a church is a place where they will be welcomed with their complicated lives. Sometimes they sit in the very back and make contact reluctantly, unconvinced that a church is a safe place, unsure that God is a refuge.

Refuge is God's idea and God's character is to shelter and protect his children. Remember Jesus' words: "Jerusalem, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings." (Matthew 23:37). And another psalm contains these comforting words: "He knows our weaknesses; he knows we are but dust."

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There are four names for God in the first two verses of this psalm: Most High, Almighty, LORD (Yahweh) and God—four different words and phrases in Hebrew. They name who God is: He is the Most High, the Almighty, the Sovereign Lord, the Eternal One. Our refuge and shelter is not in ourselves, not in our own courage or pluck or optimism or intelligence but in God whom we trust, before whom we bow the knee.

God is my refuge. Such shelter gives strength, generates hope, and honors human dignity.

God is my refuge. Such shelter leads us to wholeness. It ends our fragmentation and scattered-ness.

God is my refuge. Such shelter leads us to peace. The inner chaos subsides; the chatter of the mind goes calm and silent.

We need the shelter of God. We can live frightened and hurting and burdened, over-busy and over-tired, but that's not God's desire for us. The poet Wordsworth wrote: "Getting and spending we lay waste our lives." The missionary Jim Elliott wrote in his journal: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." And Jesus said: "What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

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God be with you as you enter a new week.