

## “BETWEEN THE NAVIGATIONAL BEACONS”

Psalm 25:1-10      February 18, 2024  
First Sunday of Lent

If any of you have been into sailing or boating at night, you know the importance of Navigational Beacons. These beacons help guide navigators safely to their destinations.

Traditionally a navigational beacon was a permanently fixed structure on land or to the seabed and it was designed to draw attention to a specific location; lighthouses and single pile structures being prime examples.

As technology improved, navigational beacons came to include radar reflectors, radio beacons, and sonic signals. These beacons are designed to guide ships into port, warn of a dangerous coast, and help sailors find their way home safely.

According to Queensland Maritime Safety Rules – a Red lateral beacon marker or flashing red light is called a **port marker**. It tells sailors to keep the left side of the boat on the right side of the marker. Conversely, a Green lateral beacon light is called a starboard marker – It tells the sailor to keep the right side of the boat to the left of the marker. Basically, you want to steer the boat your boat between the red and green markers.

Psalm 25 is classified as a psalm of lament. The psalmist and his people are in trouble from some kind of enemy, although we are not told exactly who that enemy is or what the nature of the trouble is. We only know they are a threat and are deliberately sinful.

Nevertheless, the writer is crying out for help. He is riding on rough seas, the ship of his life is in trouble, and he needs divine intervention. Through this psalm he shows us the navigational beacons of faith, a perfect place for us to enter into this season of Lent.

## **I. THE FIRST BEACON OF FAITH IS TRUST.**

Music star **Rihanna** wrote and sang a beautiful song for Marvel's movie **Black Panther: Wakanda Forever** called **Lift Me Up**. The music video has Rihanna standing on an ocean shore at sunset. On that shore is a signal fire, burning brightly in the dark. The repeated lyrics are: **Lift me up, Hold me down, Keep me close, Safe and Sound**. They are a cry of comfort for one who is mourning the loss of a loved one. She needs to be sustained and guided through a dark time.

This is the cry of the psalmist, "**To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust;**" In some worship traditions people lift their hands up. It is a visual and kinetic act that symbolizes the lifting of oneself or one's prayers to God. To lift up one's soul to God is to place our total being, body, mind, and spirit, all that makes us, in the merciful and mighty hands of God. It is a way of saying my life depends completely and only on the help of God.

The first navigational beacon of our faith is **complete trust in God**. Learning about God is not enough to guide us through the rough waters. It is only as we entrust the rudder of our life to God that we begin to sail in faith. Lifted up trust connects us to the Way of life.

## II. THE SECOND BEACON OF FAITH IS THE PATH

One of the great pleasures of living in this area is the number of natural trails available to us. Most of these trails are well maintained and marked. There are signs and even maps at many trailheads that tell you the distance, name the trail, and give you a start and end point. On the trail, colored stamps on trees are found every so many feet.

Most of the time it is easy to follow the trail, but every now and then I get lost. Sometimes I am not paying attention and sometimes it is because trails cross over one another, and they are not clearly marked. Whatever the reason, there comes a moment when I realize I am no longer where I am supposed to be. I then turn around, retrace my steps to a recognizable point and try a new direction. Of course, it helps to have a hiking buddy to offer a second opinion.

The Psalmist writes, **“Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.”**

The second navigational beacon is the path or way of God. We know to learn anything one needs a teachable spirit. This beacon requires our focus and attention and willingness to learn the ways of God. The phrase **“Make me to know your ways,”** means to know the ways of God intimately, permanently, and so we can recall them with little effort. The psalmist is referring to the basics of faith, the lessons we learned in Sunday School, the general principles of conduct that God’s

word teaches. If we follow the truths and path of God, then we experience the blessed life. If we don't we hit the rocks.

The good news is even if we veer off the path, we can come to our senses, turn around, and retrace our steps and begin again. This is called repentance, confession, and reconciliation in church language. Walking in the ways of God is the second navigational beacon. It is the call of Lent to return to the path of God.

### **III. GOD'S GOODNESS THAT SPILLS OVER**

This past summer my wife and I journeyed down Route 6 to watch the waters falling over Lake Wallenpaupack dam. We had so much rain the waters in the Lake rose to a point where the officials decided to let the overflow out. Now our local dam is nothing compared to the amount of water that flows over Niagara Falls every day, but it was fun to watch and the Wallenpaupack Creek and the Lackawaxen River certainly had their riverbanks tested.

But that overflow image is reflected in our scripture passage. The navigational beacons of faith and path are only made possible because of the overflowing goodness of God. They are built on God's character.

The Psalmist describes the kind of God we follow:

- One who is faithful to his promises.
- One who is merciful.
- One who forgives sinners.
- One who is good and righteous.

- One who instructs and leads the humble.
- One who loves.

The third navigational beacon of faith is to imitate the character goodness of God with others. In fact, this psalmist isn't just asking for his own personal edification. He desires the overflowing character goodness of God to flow into the lives of the community. This is the ethical imperative of Lent. It is not merely a private inward journey, but an outflow of blessing to the community around us, that they too would discover the navigational beacons of trust, path, and God's goodness.

In 2019, a 23-year-old woman was driving her car through the Ontario town of Tobermory. It was unfamiliar territory for her, so she was dutifully following her GPS. Indeed, she was so intent on following the device that she didn't notice that her car was headed straight for Georgian Bay — so she drove down a boat launch and straight into the frigid water. She thankfully managed to climb out and swim to shore, as her bright red Yaris sank beneath the waves.

There are several navigational beacons out in the world. Lent calls to test the beacons we are following and the outcomes they are producing. If we don't like where we are heading, perhaps we need to stop, retrace our steps, and follow the beacons of trust and true path, that share God's goodness. Don't end up in the lake. Amen.

# First Presbyterian Church in Hawley

## Sunday, February 18, 2024

### Second Scripture Lesson

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#### **Psalm 25:1-10**

<sup>1</sup>To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

<sup>2</sup>O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.

<sup>3</sup>Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

<sup>4</sup>Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths.

<sup>5</sup>Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

<sup>6</sup>Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

<sup>7</sup>Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O LORD!

<sup>8</sup>Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

<sup>9</sup>He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

<sup>10</sup>All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be To God.**