

Sermon Prepared by The Very Rev. Matt Rhodes for Christ Church, Millwood, Virginia
Third Sunday after the Epiphany, January 24, 2021

(Psalm 62:6-14)

You may not realize it, but a few moments ago those of us here in the Parish House and each of you watching from home ... all of us, together ... joined in the singing of a hymn. If you're worried that you missed something, don't; it wasn't a hymn in the sense that many of us may think of them. It's no secret that we miss our hymns and our communal singing, and with current protocols in place we're only allowed at present to have musical solos. I will say these offerings that John and Carol have been able to provide – faithfully – for these many months of COVID-tide have been a gift.

Despite those limitations however there was a hymn that we *all* just shared, and what we sang is from the hymnbook of the scriptures: the verses of Psalm 62 that were just recited. You may recall that Psalms are in fact songs that would have been sung in a variety of religious contexts in ancient Judaism. As you examine a number of them you'll find a sort of introductory statement just before the first verse that gives an identifier to its function as a sacred song. In the case of this psalm it is the statement "To the leader: according to Jeduthun;"¹ perhaps a more accurate translation would be "To the chief Musician, Jeduthun."²

As an aside ... and as your Old Testament trivia for the day ... Jeduthun was the name of one of three masters of music for Temple services appointed by King David, a position similar to a modern-day music director.³ The line just referenced may have been an indication that the verses of Psalm 62 (as well as Psalms 39 and 77, before which we also find this notation) were to be sung by a choir.⁴ While lost to us today, tunes for the singing of the Psalms would have been well known by musicians and worshipers alike.

So yes, what we said together a short time ago was and is very much a hymn ... and it is an important hymn, particularly in this extended time of uncertainty in which we find ourselves and the unsteady ground on which we stand. Perhaps the most important verse in this hymn is a refrain we find twice (with slight variations between the two) in Psalm 62, one at its opening and again in first verses of today's portion.

For God alone my soul in silence waits; truly, my hope is in him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold, so that I shall not be shaken.

It's incredibly powerful that this psalm cycled through our Sunday lectionary in the midst of this particular season in our communal history. This is a time when there is much throwing us off balance ... a time when events in this nation and the world cause grief and distress ... a time when a pandemic continues to impact men and women, young and old, rich and poor, without distinction between status or background, class or community ... a time when people near to us and those far away are scared and unsure. Because of that this

¹ Psalm 62 (NRSV).

² Psalm 62. "Scripture4All Hebrew Interlinear Bible," <https://www.scripture4all.org/OnlineInterlinear/OTpdf/psa62.pdf>.

³ "Jeduthun." Entry in "Bible Study Tools," <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/eastons-bible-dictionary/jeduthun.html>.

⁴ Ibid.

psalm – in the words of Walter Brueggemann and William Bellinger – should be thought of “as an expression of trust in God in the face of difficulty.”⁵

For God alone my soul in silence waits; truly, my hope is in him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold, so that I shall not be shaken.

For some it's natural in this life to have the greatest trust in the things we *can* see. The greater challenge for many others is to have trust ... to have *faith* ... in the One we *can't* see. For some it's easier to have faith in the things *we know*; the greater challenge for many is to maintain faith in the one *who knows us*. In those moments the words sung by the temple choir centuries ago echo forth once again:

For God alone my soul in silence waits; truly, my hope is in him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold, so that I shall not be shaken.

At a point in our history when there are innumerable ways for people to talk ... and talk ... and talk ... and talk *over* ... and talk down to ... and drown out one another, silence is difficult to achieve. But the silence in this psalm isn't the silence of a voice or even a silence in our surroundings; it is a silence of the soul, “an inner stillness [in the words of James Mays] that comes with yielding all fears and anxieties and insecurities to God in an act of trust.”⁶ In my mind I equate it to the sheer, powerful, overwhelming silence in the encounter between God and Elijah at the mouth of the cave.

The value of the silence is *the silence itself*. The gift of the silence is the space it allows for the voice of God. The reward of the silence is what we learn and discern and *who we encounter* in its very depths.

For God alone my soul in silence waits; truly, my hope is in him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold, so that I shall not be shaken.

This morning as with countless mornings throughout time immemorial, there is much weighing on people's minds. Illness and death. Hunger and homelessness. Overwork and joblessness. Classism, sexism and racism. Fears for our youth and tears for our elderly. A desire for nothing more than comfort in a world that makes many uncomfortable. Often, the response is to talk loudly and give voice to the discomfort ... or to yell over ... or to diminish rather than enhance ... or to subject rather than protect. But again Jeduthun steps before the choir and we hear the words of the psalmist:

For God alone my soul in silence waits; truly, my hope is in him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold, so that I shall not be shaken.

When the ground shifts beneath your feet, let your soul wait in silence for God. When you are made to feel uncomfortable or in fact discover you have made someone else uncomfortable, seek comfort by letting your soul wait in silence for God. When you are afraid of what is happening in the world or even what is happening in *your* world ... when illness has you feeling defeated or death has you feeling grief-stricken ... seek comfort by

⁵ Walter Brueggemann and William Bellinger. *Psalms*, p. 274.

⁶ James L. Mays. *Psalms*, p. 216.

letting your soul wait in silence for God. When you speak and don't feel you're being heard or perhaps when you realize you can't hear others because you aren't letting them speak, seek comfort by letting your soul wait in silence for God.

Truly, my hope is in him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold, so that I shall not be shaken.

Amen.