

Light in the Never-Ending Shade

(Reflection by Rev. Peggy McDonagh, January 24, 2021)

The God of Life within me greets and honors the God of Life within each of you. This past week has been filled with emotions that perhaps we have not felt for a very long time. With the inaugurations of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, it seemed to me this past week that for many people it felt as if there was a spark of new hope and a refreshed stirring of passion for change. For me personally, I felt as if God had been holding our lives with hope, possibility, optimism, and grace.

“When day comes, we ask ourselves,
where can we find light in this never-ending shade?”

These opening lines from Amanda Gorman’s poem, “The Hills We Climb,” that she presented during the inauguration, beautifully but simply acknowledges the state of the world. This never-ending shade of a global pandemic, complicated political situations, grief and moral turmoil, brutality, racism, and violence have been all encompassing.

I love the imagery of ‘never-ending shade’ because it suggests that we are not living in complete darkness. The image of “shade” is hopeful because we can still see dimly what might be possible to heal the world. The shade encompasses all of life’s tragedies piled up and overflowing into one immense, clumped-together sadness and suffering. We hear Amanda’s question with ever encouraged hearts, where can we find light in this shade? This week it has felt as if some light had penetrated the never-ending shade.

On Wednesday, as I watched the inauguration and worked on the worship service, I thought about how appropriate the “God is Holding Your Life” series is for these troubled times in which we live. As I mentioned last week, the psalmist’s poetry is accompanying us through this series, reminding us that in spite of all that life throws at us, we can trust that God is, indeed, holding our lives.

The Psalms creatively and powerfully speak of how the Hebrew people of the ancient world experienced light in the never-ending shade of their world. As I listened to Amanda share her poem, it occurred to me that she had written a modern-day psalm of hope that we can live by just as the Hebrew people lived by the hope-filled words of the original psalms.

The Book of Psalms is filled with beautiful songs and poetic scripture that encompass almost every human emotion: anguish, lament, confusion,

remorse, sorrow, doubt, despair, and bewilderment, but also happiness, trust, hope, exuberance, love, contentment, and joy. We too have experienced many of these emotions over the past year and Psalm 62 is certainly an appropriate poem for these times.

This Psalm is attributed to King David and written during a particularly desperate time in his life. He endured the tremendous pressures of living in an age of disruption, corruption, and war. Looming over most of his adult life were the threats of death, creating shadows of fear and desperation. For many years of his life, David lived as a fugitive, on the run from King Saul and his paranoia. As a King, David led his armies against fierce enemy nations, and most tragically, his trusted friends and even his own son turned on him and conspired against his life. David had placed his trust in many worldly things, all of which failed him.

For David, music and poetry settled his soul and his heart and his extraordinary wisdom and faith are evident in what he wrote. In the face of his never-ending shade, David displayed great resilience and his faith would not be shaken. In Psalm 62, he uses a rock to symbolize the steadfast assurance he had in God.

In the Hebrew Testament, rocks were quite significant. During the sudden storms in deserts of the Middle East, large rocks would provide shelter and safety for shepherds and sojourners. David experienced profound peace and rested safely in his unwavering faith in God, who was his rock, his refuge in the storms of his life.

In his book *Exposition of the Psalms*, Anglican Minister and Old Testament Scholar Dr. H.C. Leupold writes, "There is scarcely another psalm that reveals such an absolute and undisturbed peace, in which confidence in God is completely unshaken, and in which assurance is so strong that not even one single petition is voiced throughout."

For David, God was his stronghold, his rock of strength, his refuge, a light in his never-ending shade. I wondered, what is our refuge, our rock, our strength, our light in the never-evening shade of our world?

In her wise and brave Psalm for the 21st century, Amanda tells us that our light, or as David might say, our rock, our refuge, reside in the hope, possibilities, and dreams of a future yet to be. In her poem there existed a palpable anticipation of a bright light beyond the struggle. The light in our never-ending shade shines from people who are resilient, brave, and bold; people who help shape a world in which all "cultures, colors, characters and conditions of humanity" are accepted and included.

The light will shine when we no longer put our trust in war, exclusion, and division and set "difference aside and laying down arms so our arms

can reach out to one another.” Amanda speaks of the light as “harm to none – harmony to all,” a world in which no one is afraid and where “victory won’t lie in the blade, but in all the bridges we’ve made.” The light will shine “if we merge mercy with might, and might with right, then love becomes our legacy.”

Just as David poured out his trust in God in Psalm 62 and proclaimed that "God alone is my rock," Amanda poured out her passion for justice, truth, and wisdom in, 'The Hills We Climb.' Her inspirational, insightful, and timely poem will continue to inspire us. She encourages us to not only see the light but be the light, so that we can step out of the shade "afire and unafraid."

My friends, this week, I felt God's hands of love holding our lives. May we all be empowered to find a way “to rebuild, to reconcile, and recover” this world that is our home, battered and beautiful as it is. Even as we grieve, we will grow, even as we hurt, we will hope, and even as we get so tired, we continue to try...

Yes, we may have a long journey ahead of us to shape the future for which we yearn, but, like David, we can say, “I shall not be shaken,” “We shall not be shaken.” Hopefully Amanda’s words will continue to inspire and rekindle people’s passion to find "the power, to author a new chapter. To offer hope and laughter to ourselves.”

Let us embrace these two remarkable poems of trust and love that in their own separate ways help us put our trust in the One who, indeed, is holding our lives. Amen.