

File: Rally Day 2018 SOC

Text: Psalm 71:1-16

Dear Friends in Christ, Grace to you and Peace from Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, Amen!

The story is told of a group of nomads travelling across the scorching sands of North Africa. As they began to run out of food and water the weary travelers came across an oasis. They refreshed themselves and their camels with a drink from the pool of cold clear water and rested in the shade of the palm trees. It was so beautiful and restful they decided to spend the night.

At dusk they saw a long traveler walking in the desert towards the oasis. This was unheard of because no one travelled alone and on foot in the desert without a camel to carry their stuff and water. After visiting around the campfire that evening they realized the traveler spoke with wisdom and authority.

The next morning the nomads packed up their stuff and the lone man said to them “before leaving, gather as many pebbles as you can and store them in the saddle of your camels. Travel a week’s journey and at the end of one week you will find yourselves both glad and sad.”

So they loaded up their camels with as many rocks as they could handle and set out. After a couple of days it was clear the weight of the rocks was too big of a burden for the camels. At camp that night all of the travelers but one dumped out

the rocks because their survival depended on the ability of their animals to cope with the desert heat. The next morning as they prepared to leave, the only man to save his rocks reached into the saddle bag and discovered the rocks had turned into diamonds.

Just as the wise traveler had said, one was glad because his rocks had become diamonds. The others were sad because they'd taken the easy way out and got rid of their rocks. They all said if they had it to do over again they would have not only stuffed the saddles full of rocks but they would have filled their pockets as well. But of course they didn't get to do it over again, and neither do we get to do life over again. We get one shot at it.

It happens in life that some things that feel like rocks that weigh us down, if we hang onto them actually in the long run become diamonds. I'm sure if you identify some of the wise people in your life, they had a few words of wisdom for you which at first felt more like a rock than a diamond but in the long run their words proved wise.

Today is Rally Day at a lot of churches including SOC. It's easy for Rally Day to be a religious version of the state fair. A kind of "let's get pumped up for fall" kind of thing. And certainly that's not all bad. But here's the real deal: Lots of people think church, going to worship, Sunday School, Confirmation, Bible

reading and all of the things people associate with church are a lot like rocks which will never become diamonds, that they are things which only weigh them down and get in the way of their enjoyment of life and so they discard them.

That's why a lot of contemporary preaching and church stuff is built around emphasizing to strengthen your will, or how to build one's character or learning how to be happy for the next 50 years. Here's the deal there are a lot of self-help books that can teach that stuff and some of them do it pretty well. That's all inward focused stuff because it's all about me. It's gets the basic relationship between God and us backward. It basically teaches that God is here to serve us instead of the biblically truth that we are here to serve and worship God.

Church is about is pointing people to Jesus. Not pointing God to us. Why? Because you're not always going to be happy, you're going to run into some tough stuff in life. No matter how strong you think your character is you're going to make some choices that will reveal you're not as strong as you think. On top of that each of us will face tragedy at some point in life and disappointments and we will all ultimately face death and "me" is not enough. So if church is primarily about being happy and building our character and focusing inward rather pointing to Jesus we've missed the boat.

Wait a second Pastor you're not being very upbeat for Rally Day. Aren't we supposed to Rally the troops on Rally Day? Yes, but what I'm saying is here at SOC we want to rally the troops for things that will stand in the face of eternity not for things that will change like the latest fashion trend. We're not in this for fluff or Christianity Lite. We're about growing disciples and programs and ministries, Sunday School, confirmation, preaching and more that stands in the face of eternity. We're about knowing that one day those rocks will turn into diamonds.

Quite honestly, that's why worshipping regularly or being a faith guide in SS or Confirmation or singing in the choir or playing in the band or ushering or greeting or being in a small group whatever it is—is so important. The person who sees those things as just rocks will never get it because to them it's just religious stuff and a burden—let somebody else carry the load. But to the one who knows those things make an eternal difference they know one day they will really be diamonds.

The words of Psalm 71 this morning are the words of a man whose been around. The words of a man who spent a lot of time in worship and I'm sure there were a few times when the service was too long or the preacher was anything but entertaining. He's a man who received instruction from others in the faith who sometimes was bored but a man who loaded up with rocks who didn't throw them

away and they ultimately became a faith like a diamond. This is the kind of faith we were after at SOC listen to his words

“in you Lord, I take refuge; in your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me. Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my rock and fortress...For you, O Lord are my hope, my trust, O Lord from my youth. Upon you I have learned from my birth; it was you who took me from my mother’s womb my praise is continually of you. You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will revive me again; from the depth of the earth you will bring me up again...”

Those are the words of a man who’s learned to yield to God in his life. Those are the words of a man who praises and cries out to God even in the face of adversity, not just when it’s convenient. These are the words of a spiritually mature person. These are the words of a guy who hung onto those rocks even when they seemed heavy and in the unlikeliest of times discovered they’d become diamonds.

That’s what we’re after. The diamond like faith that stands up in the face of both hardship and joy in life but most importantly stands up in the face of eternity.

Let’s be honest and admit there may be times when it comes to faith when it feels like we’ve picked up a bunch of rocks because we don’t see immediate

results. Being a faith guide in Sunday School or Confirmation, worshipping regularly, possibly committing to as small group sometimes it just feels like loading a bunch of rocks much less diamonds into our already overcrowded schedules.

So what do we do? We start chucking rocks out of our bag to make our travelling through life easier. Because we don't see an immediate payoff and they aren't "fun or entertaining we remove stuff like prayer, reading the Bible, regular worship, volunteering for Sunday School or Confirmation. The truth is that most of the time you just need to marinate your soul in this stuff for a long time even years and decades before they turn into diamonds.

The writer of the Psalm had a deep deep walk with God because he hung onto those rocks. He's a man who'd undergone many trials and problems, and my prayer is that when real trials come my way in life and yours and when we face death as did he we're able to say like him **"For you, O Lord are my hope, my trust from my youth. My praise is continually of you. From the depth of the earth you will bring me up again."** You don't get to have that kind of trust in The Lord unless your life has marinated in the things of God which to many were simply rocks but he was wise enough to know they were really diamonds.

This man knew God. It is obvious he'd known God for many years and known God's faithfulness in a number of previous difficult situations. So in this instance when he needs to trust God, it's not a matter of, "God if you exist, whoever you are, if you're out there I need your help!" He didn't need to take a blind leap of faith because he knew his God in a personal, practical, proven way because he hung onto those rocks.

Folks on this Rally Day you're invited to renew your commitment to carrying rocks that will someday be diamonds for you. If you've unloaded the rock of regular worship consider that it will one day turn into the diamond of encouragement. If you've unloaded the rock of prayer consider that one day it could turn into the diamond of intimacy with God. If you've unloaded the rock of serving consider that one day it could turn into the diamond of some young person coming to you and saying how you taught them about Jesus, or long after you're gone they might be kneeling next to their bed after losing a loved one thanking God that you taught them about Jesus.

Fill your life and the lives of others with what at first may seem like rocks but are really diamonds. Diamonds which allow our souls to echo with the words of Psalm 71 *"For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust My praise is continually of you."*

Fill your life with things that will one day turn to diamonds, the things that stand up to eternity.. In Jesus name Amen!