

From Everlasting to Everlasting

LaGrave Christian Reformed Church

New Year's Eve

Candlelight Communion Service

Rev. Ruth Boven

Psalm 103

“From Everlasting to Everlasting,” says the psalmist. This is where my mind goes when I contemplate the cosmic question of what everlasting to everlasting even means. My mind goes back to childhood. My younger sister and I, tired out from the flips and jumps we'd been doing on the family trampoline, are now resting on our backs. We're looking up into a vast summer sky, wondering out loud if the other had ever been able to understand how God didn't have a beginning and how eternal life would have no end. How can that be? We tried bending our minds, which seemed harder than bending our bodies (at that point in our life anyway), but no matter the mental gymnastics, we could only begin to touch with our minds such a huge, cosmic concept.

“From everlasting to everlasting”, says the psalmist. In other words, it doesn't matter how far you look back in time and even before time existed, God was present and God was God. Psalm 90 says. “Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” And it doesn't matter how far you look ahead, or how intently you peer into the unknowable future, God will be present and God will be God. From Everlasting to Everlasting.

You know, as we consider such a huge cosmic landscape that we can only begin wrapping our minds around – I think it causes a couple different reactions in us. First, as people of faith we are awed. We stand in wonder before a God who is incomprehensibly powerful and eternal and infinite and all those other lofty attributes. And it moves us to praise. The final verses of Psalm 103 point us in that direction.

“The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. ²⁰ Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. ²¹ Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. ²² Praise the LORD, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the Lord, Oh my soul.”

Praise – it's a fitting response to the everlasting nature of God. But there also may be something else you feel in your soul as you consider such lofty truths about God. Perhaps it makes you feel a sense of distance between you and God. Perhaps these huge ideas and claims about God has you looking over the landscape of your own small life and of the world we live in and has you wondering - Hmmm - well where is God in this landscape. Because honestly, sometimes it can feel like the landscape around us is falling apart.

Craig Barnes, President of Princeton Seminary, wrote an article last year in the Christian Century titled “The Center That Can Hold.” He draws attention to the fact that the world has always been falling apart. You don't have to read very far in history to find cultures destroyed by invading armies or deadly plagues or an economic depression that stripped people of their farms, jobs, and hopes for a future. And even if you succeed in ignoring global realities, we are always fighting against the demise of our own personal

worlds. We're surrounded by marriages that crumble, companies that downsize, and diseases or accidents that rob us of loved ones or make us fearful about our own personal future.

You see, at this level we have the real landscape of our lives and the broken world we live in, and at this level we have the cosmic landscape of God's everlasting reign. And tonight we ask, what do the two have to do with each other? I think we're only being honest to admit that sometimes it seems as if these two parallel landscapes, the cosmic and the earthly, are far apart. As a pastor who has been with folks and prayed with them in tragic situations of loss or pain – there have been times when the grief in the room was so very thick that the cries of our hearts felt small and futile, and like they were not coming close to rising above our crumbling landscape to the realm above.

But, thankfully, it's not true, that those two realms run parallel forever. They don't. The good news of the gospel is that these two realms, these two landscapes have already intersected. They intersected at just the right moment in time. Scripture calls it the fullness of time - when God sent his only begotten Son, to come here, to enter our own landscape, to be born one of us, and to give himself up so that we might have hope, and might be able to face a new day, a new challenge, a new year without fear.

The good news is that in Christ, the cosmic God became intensely personal. And in Christ's coming and in his death on the cross with his arms stretched out wide enough for the whole world, we became children of God. Children embraced by a God who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The everlasting God has visited us, has laid down his own life, so that in the midst of a troubled landscape we might have hope and not fear.

I recently watched an episode of a PBS show called *We'll Meet Again* hosted by Ann Curry. In it she helps bring folks together who have experienced some kind of significant moment in time together. This episode was the story of a young soldier who had no idea what he was getting into when he was sent to Korea to fight a war. At first Jim, the one whose story is told, saw minimal action as a gunner. But in July of 1951 that changed. One day Jim's division or battery suddenly and unexpectedly found itself under a bombardment of heavy artillery. He and his fellow soldiers sort of hunkered down into their trenches as they were getting barraged with incoming fire. To make things worse for these young men, their communication had been completely blown out from enemy fire. They quickly lost a couple of guns and were losing men at the same rate. Jim said that just about the time he thought all was lost, he looked up and he saw two lieutenants out of their bunkers, out in the open landscape. They were coming to visit the terrified soldiers in their trenches, "to encourage us," he said, "and to see what we needed." He said with tears brimming his eyes, "Whatever protection I had, they had none. They took tremendous risks doing their job that day, even though they could have died."

I was moved by that story of self-sacrifice because it made a huge impact on the lives of others. But I think this is what moved me even more. That story pointed me to the bigger story of the everlasting God who made a personal visitation to the trenches of this world, to the folks living in a landscape of darkness, to bring light and hope and comfort and help. There's a new year ahead of us. There will be joy and goodness and plenty of reasons for praise. And there will be sorrow and pain and sometimes fearful things. Here is my challenge to you.

First - know that into your life, into your trench, the cosmic God who has become intensely personal will come, will visit you. Wait for him. Listen for him. Look for him. Second, consider this question: whose trench might you visit in the year ahead to bring light and help and

hope? Remember, you won't be alone in that rough landscape – for from everlasting to everlasting God's love is with us.
Thanks be to God. Amen

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