"Lead me to the rock that is higher than I"
Psalm 61:2

"THE COMFORT AND CHALLENGE OF RELIGION"

Behind this petition is a picture. Picture of cold, windswept plateau Northern Palestine in rainy season. Chilly northeast wind has driven rain for days. A traveler, weary and wet to the skin, with beast of burden finds welcome shelter under lee of great rock. Psalmist declares - "God is like that - a refuge in time storm. Lead me to rock that is higher than I".

The picture changes. The season also has changed. A traveler finds protection from blazing sun; from hot blasts and stinging sand of desert in shelter and shadow of that rock. "God is like that - a rock in weary land". In stress and storms of life one can cry out "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I".

Rock of Refuge Psalmist's thinking essentially Jewish. Concept of God terms of refuge and safety and shelter. Read Hebrew history; see this concept is always to forefront of Jewish consciousness. He was their rock, their fortress, their deliverer. Remember, their enemies were very near and real to them. Palestine a buffer state between Syria and Egypt. Surrounded by pagan and powerful nations. They were weak and not particularly a fighting people. Hence, were driven back to place reliance and hope in God. As a compensation for their military weakness, they fostered a belief in a God who had their interests as a nation at heart. He would do battle for them - He was the "Lord of Hosts". He would give them special protection. He was their "rock and their fortress".

Let us admit that in this concept there is some wishful thinking; some compensation; an expression of what we call "comfort religion". I believe there is more than that. With insight, in this vivid word-picture, the psalmist is say-
ing that there is a power in religion — something which can give security and peace amid all stresses of life. Something, some power, which saves a person from being completely overwhelmed by the storms that beat upon him.

Psalmist has made discovery that life is matter of storms. There is a need for a rock — for shelter. Place where one can find temporary quietness and peace — where one can catch one's breath and renew one's faith before going out into the storm and journey once more. My observation: with that kind of a faith one can meet life, and death with serenity and dignity. All that is implied in the petition.

Call it a comfort religion if you will; I repeat, there are experiences of life when we need that kind of religion and faith.

"A Good Stiff Climb" But religion is more than a refuge — more than a retreat — more than comfort. It is, or it should be, a challenge. A creative force that keeps a person ever striving. In the vivid picture of the rock, the psalmist suggests the element of challenge. True the rock is the symbol of comfort and refuge; it is also the symbol of challenge and climbing and struggle.

The prayer of psalmist is not that of a whimpering, frightened child. It is the resolute request of a brave soul. There is a sturdy old paraphrase — "LORD! GIVE ME A GOOD STIFF CLIMB". What do we want from God? What does God want from us? True, sometimes we need refuge. Must have that. Fundamentally we need more than that — we shall never be completely satisfied with crouching behind the rock — we must climb it!

There is challenge here as well as comfort. We are not made for clinging but for climbing. The rock represents the perpetual challenge to man. In Switzerland is little cemetery under shadow of mountains. Tombstone of man lost his life trying to climb Jungfrau. Words, "HE DIED CLIMBING" One is reminded of heroic attempt to climb Everest. Irvine and Mallory chosen make
final dash - 600 feet from top. They never returned. Official account reads, "When last seen, they were climbing and going strongly for the top."

Christianity does present a challenge. At center is a Cross. It calls for crucifixion. We have thought too much of Christ in terms of the "gentle Jesus, meek and mild". Walking flowery fields with little lamb snuggled in arms; and contented, placid sheep looking up at Him as He walks green pastures and still waters.

In contrast there is that other picture of Good Shepherd. No gentle and green pastures but desperate and wild country. Out in mountains - among the rocks. Blackness of approaching storm and night. On high ledge is lost and bedraggled sheep. Climbing toward it is the shepherd - seeking the lost; weather-stained and strong.

In days like these we need to present the present the challenge - and there is one. With all unknown questions in regard to persecution of Christians in Hungary, this is certain, there are men willing to face the cost and pay price. Willing to make the climb in terms of discipline and suffering. Ready to meet the challenge.

The Synthesis in Christian experience there must be these two elements - comfort and challenge. Notice how in the teaching and message of Jesus there is a synthesis of these elements. Not a word of comfort is offered that is not accompanied with a word of challenge. Most beautiful of sayings of Jesus - "Come unto Me all ye that labor...I will give you rest". Notice challenge that follows the invitation - "Take my yoke upon you..."

Take New Testament idea of forgiveness. We relieved to know God has promised to take sins and cast them behind back to be remembered no more against us. We are pardoned. There's comfort in the idea. We know we need forgiveness. But also challenge there. Cannot accept comfort without the challenge. Must be ready to forgive those who trespass against us. Get rid of malice and resentment and hardness. Must make climb.
Or take the greatest idea and ideal Christ gives to us - that is, the idea the God loves us - as persons. He knows our name. As intimate as that. Strained language to uttermost to get people to see that. What comfort in the idea - God loves me. But what a challenge goes with such comfort: What challenging implications. God loves the individual - God loves every individual. Every piece of human wreckage. Every delict of society. The least and last and lost.

Means that all men are of value in sight of God the Father. Means that all are brothers. It means not only the comfort of knowing that God loves me, but also the challenge of living in a certain way because God loves all men. What a climb! Dare we pray, Lord, give me a good stiff climb?

We want the comfort of our religion and our faith; but are we willing to bear the cost and to meet the challenge. Are we willing to make the climb? Jesus made the climb. It cost Him His life - it led Him to a hill called Calvary; it impaled Him upon a Cross. Thank God for the climb He made. Thank God for those who have made the climb since.


He fought a good fight. Mixture of comfort and challenge. Terrific pain at times. Wanted to graduate and enter Harvard. Tutors. After 14 months out of school he graduated with class. Description is given in following words.

Died on June 30th after 15 months of pain. His mother speaks of his gaiety and gallantry - his courage. From his diary they discovered he had known all along how serious was his illness. Gaily pretended all was well. "Pretending with us, and bearing our burden with the spirit, the élan, of a singing soldier or laughing saint".


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Almighty God,
forgive me for my avariciousness;
I shall try to keep it gentle,
not cynical nor a bad influence.

And O, if thou art truly great
in the heavens,
accept my gratitude for
all thy gifts,
and I shall try to fear
the good fear. Amen.
God's Care

MY SON, suffer Me to do with thee what I please; I know what is expedient for thee. Thou thinkest as man; thou judgest in many things as human feelings persuade thee.

O Lord, what Thou sayest is true. Greater is Thy anxiety for me, than all the care that I can take for myself. For he standeth but very totteringly, who casteth not all his anxiety upon Thee.

O Lord, if only my will may remain right and firm towards Thee, do with me whatsoever it shall please Thee. For it cannot be anything but good, whatsoever Thou shalt do with me. If Thou willest me to be in darkness, be Thou blessed; and if Thou willest me to be in light, be Thou again blessed. If Thou vouchsafe to comfort me, be Thou blessed; and if Thou willest me to be afflicted, be Thou ever equally blessed.

My son, such as this ought to be thy state, if thou desire to walk with Me. Thou oughtest to be as ready to suffer as to rejoice. Thou oughtest as cheerfully to be destitute and poor, as full and rich.

O Lord, cheerfully will I suffer for Thy sake, whatever Thou shalt will to come upon me. From Thy hand I am willing to receive indifferently good and evil, sweet and bitter, joy and sorrow, and for all that befalleth me, to give Thee thanks.

Keep me safe from all sin, and I shall fear neither death nor hell. So as Thou cast me not from Thee for ever, nor blot me out of the book of life, whatever tribulation may come upon me shall not hurt me.

Thomas à Kempis
FREMONT STREET METHODIST CHURCH  
Gloversville, New York  
February 20, 1949

ORGAN - "Ave Maria"  
Arcadelt-Liszt

CALL TO WORSHIP - By the minister

HYMN 381 - "The Church's one Foundation"  
Aurelia

Minister: The Lord be with you.  
People: And with thy spirit.

Minister: Lift up your hearts.  
People: We lift them up unto the Lord

DOXOLOGY - To be sung by all

CALL TO PRAYER - By the minister

PRAYER OF CONFESSION - To be said by all

Have mercy upon us, O God, according to thy loving  
kindness; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out our transgressions. Wash us thoroughly  
from our iniquities and cleanse us from our sins. For  
we acknowledge our transgressions, and our sin is ever  
before us. Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew  
a right spirit within us; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYER FOR PARDON - By the minister

RESPONSIVE READING - 6th Sunday :: 1st Reading

GLORIA PATRI :: APOSTLES' CREED

SCRIPTURE LESSON - Psalm 61:1-5; 62:1-8

ANTHEM - "Praise we our God"  
Vulpius

Youth and Children's Choirs

PASTORAL PRAYER :: LORD'S PRAYER

OFFERTORY ANTHEM - "The heavens are telling"  
Beethoven

HYMN 111 - "Faithest Lord Jesus"  
Crusaders' Hymn

SERMON - "THE COMFORT AND CHALLENGE OF RELIGION"  
The minister

HYMN 213 - "My faith looks up to Thee"  
Olivet

BENEDICTION :: SEVENFOLD AMEN

Rev. Fred Clarke, Minister

Miss Gloria Iacone, Minister of Music

Mrs. Harvey Connor, Minister's Assistant

Mrs. Keith Gifford, Church Secretary

Mr. Lewis Cunning, Sexton

CALENDAR FOR TODAY

10:30 Morning Worship and sermon.

10:30 Church School - Children's Division.

11:45 Church School - Youth and Adult Divisions.

6:00 M. Y. F. Leader, Marie Gunderson. Topic,  
"BOUNDARY LINES". All youth invited.

7:30 Union Evening Service at St. James' Lutheran  
Church. Preacher, the Rev. Hanford D. Wright.

Altar flowers are given by Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Reynolds  
in memory of their parents - Mr. and Mrs. George Scher-  
merhorn and Mr. and Mrs. David Reynolds.

THROUGH THE WEEK

MOM. 11:00 Weekday School of Religion.

7:30 Boy Scouts - Troop 7.

8:00 "ADVANCE" committee meeting at the church.

8:00 E.W.P. Class meets with Mrs. Lyle Reffue.

TUES. 6:30 Laurel Band - Cordial Class Annual Banquet  
to be served by the Couples Club.

WED. 7:30 Mid-week Service. Presentation of fourth  
film on "The Life of the Apostle Paul".

THURS. 3:45 Minister's Membership Class.

7:30 Fremont Choir rehearsal.

8:00 Werner Workers meet with Mrs. Edson Platts  
9th letter. White Elephant sale.

FRI. 3:45 Youth Choir rehearsal.

7:00 Sleighride for Junior High Department with  
refreshments at the church.

SAT. 9:15 Children's Choir rehearsal.

9:00 Washington Party at the Pythian Hall under  
auspices of Couples and Saturday Nite Clubs.

Douglass Guenther is in attendance this week-end at the  
Annual State Christian Youth Conference at Syracuse.

Copies of the special "METHODIST ADVANCE" number of the  
Christian Advocate will be given out, one to a family at  
the close of this service. Secure your copy.