



## Newsletter of the English-Speaking United Methodist Congregation in Munich: September 2020

### God Is Not on the Mountain Top

Meditation on Psalm 121 by Israel Pereira



Brothers and sisters, I had just come from a six-day mountain tour in the Alps when I preached this meditation in the Sunday evening

service at Peace Church. The words “I lift up my eyes to the mountains - where does my help come from?” were on my mind and kept repeating over and over again. Mountains, what is it about mountains that drives the imagination of people? That fuels the romantic wish of adventure? That empowers the instincts of fear and survival? And, as in Psalm 121, awakens the promise of hope and protection?

We need to read today’s passage with a traveler’s eyes. Someone, who has embarked on a journey and looks towards the challenges ahead. He lifts up his eyes, looks towards the mountains and asks a rhetorical question: “Where does my help come from?” Have you ever asked yourself this question? In your own journey, in your situation?

The first point that I find in today’s passage is **the confidence in God’s help**. Some interpreters have suggested that mountains in this context have a negative connotation. Mountains have dangerous paths. Mountains can be treacherous. You may start the day in good weather, then you go up the mountain and see a huge cloud with no chance of you getting away. And a storm comes in. Mountains can be a place of loneliness. It might feel nice for a time, away from the internet, away from civilization and into nature. Yet after a time, it might get lonely. Also, mountains are a place where false gods were worshiped in the Old Testament.

Others have suggested a rather positive connotation in this passage. Mountains serve as a stronghold, a natural wall of protection for a city. Especially in ancient times. Mountains also provide a source of freshwater. Mountains are beautiful, a reminder of the true forces of nature. In the Bible, mountains are a place to experience God. Where Moses received the 10 Commandments. Where God’s presence came as a cloud for six days in Mount Sinai. We also hear about Mount Zion, a reminder of Jerusalem’s stronghold and temple.



But if we look into the Hebrew meaning behind the words “to lift up my eyes”, it rather brings the meaning of longing, or to

desire something. Then we come somewhat closer to what the central message of these verses is. Regardless of both positive and negative connotations associated with the mountains, the focus goes rather beyond the mountains. It goes beyond the dangers and the beauty of these majestic formations. It goes in the direction of confidence. Confidence of help, in the midst of a journey. So, the traveler sees the mountain, yet his thoughts leap beyond the mountains towards the heavens; beyond the heavens and to the Maker, the creator. The thought does not stay on the mountains. At the same time, this Creator, Maker of heavens and earth is not fixed on a mountain throughout this chapter. The rest of the Psalm develops into an expanding circle of promises and prayer of God’s watchful care. Of a God, who is not fixed on top of mountains, not far into the heavens, but a personal God, who is close and is watchful.

That leads me into my second point: **The watchful care of God.**

**“He will not let your foot slip — he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.”**



The speaker of the psalm changes from the first person in verses 1 and 2 to the second person. It now becomes a prayer. We

have the imagery of a God, who does not sleep. A God who is close, watching and who will not let your foot slip. In the larger, near east, ancient tradition, gods were frequently depicted sleeping. But here the Psalmist emphasizes multiple times, that not only does God not sleep, but he doesn't even doze or nod off. Rather remains attentive and constantly watches over his people so that not even a foot of theirs will slip from the path.

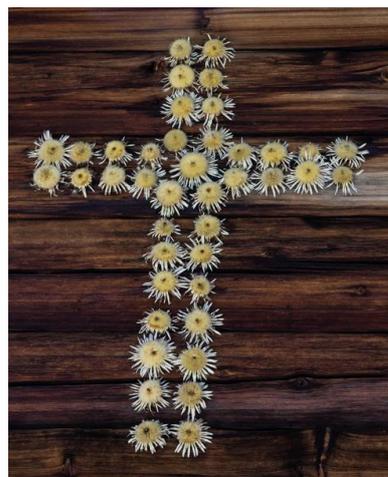
Later the psalmist talks about God being your shade at your right hand. The word shade or shadow is so often used in the Old Testament, showing this imagery of closeness of God, or protection of God. God and shadow represent his watchful care. Moreover, there is an interesting meaning behind placing God at your right hand. Soldiers carried their shield on the left hand, leaving their right hand usually exposed. The imagery of God standing at the right hand is that of one, who provides an extra shield in your vulnerability. The psalmist wants to emphasize the imagery of this constant God. A God who is like a shadow, a God who is with you even in your vulnerabilities, a God who is constantly watching over you. A God who is with you and not fixed on top of a mountain. And so, God is not only portrayed as the creator, one who is greater than the adversaries, but also one who walks with you in the midst of adversaries. Close to you like a shadow.

Brothers and sisters, this chapter is not a mere confidence boost. Neither an assurance that the journey of life will be without slips or falls or sorrows or worries. It is a prayer. It is rather a reminder that in life's journey, either walking towards the mountain, or away from it, God will remain watchful, God will remain as close to you as

a shadow. Not only on top of a mountain, but close to you. In your slips or in your vulnerability, God will be as close to you as a shadow. As a pastor said once, “God is closer to me than my own breath”.

On my journey to the Alps, I had the opportunity to go alone to a mountain top. And so, I initiated my journey, a journey full of rocky grounds and treacherous corners. I felt then some rain drops. I looked over and I saw huge rain clouds coming towards me. There were only about 200 meters left to the mountain top. It would be very fitting to say that I made it to the top, that I had the courage and persistence and I conquered my challenge. Yet the truth is, I turned back. I saw the clouds, felt the rain, and even though I saw two older ladies coming down from the mountain top, I turned back.

The potential dangers raised my alarm. In the six days of my mountain tour I fell, hurt my back, my knee, my wife slipped. Our two other friends also had their injuries. There were failures. **But God is not fixed on the mountain top.** God is as close to you as a shadow. You do not need to be successful; you do not need to reach the mountain top to experience God. God is with you in the midst of your slips, in the midst of your troubles he watches over you. This same God also came down from heaven to earth in the person of Jesus experienced, in his journey, sorrows and sadness. You do not need to reach the mountain top to experience God. God came down and is present in every slip, fear, failure of life's journey.



And so, the Psalmist ends the chapter, not at the end of his journey, yet lists the promise of God's care for eternity. **“The LORD will keep you from all harm — he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and**

**going - both now and forevermore.”**

**God is not on a mountain top; he is with you on your life's journey and beyond.**

**Amen**

## News from Peace Church Life



**Homework Club is going to re-open on Sep. 18th.**

**However slightly different:**

**In respect of the current circumstances and regulations we can only offer our support to students visiting 5th class and above.**

**Please let us know who is planning to come, so we can prepare properly.**

**Homework Club will start at 14:00/2pm and end around 17:00/5pm, as usual in the fellowship hall at Peace Church.**

**We will have to stick to the current Corona regulations and will be explaining and updating them every Friday.**

### Church Life in Corona Times

By Pastor Christine

Never in my life as a pastor, nor in my 20 years at Peace Church, has the life of individuals and communities been shaped by what the German politicians call the Infection Protection Act. What we do or don't do as a private person or as a church community is determined by a virus and the terrible illness it can cause. The decision whether we go out or stay home, whether we invite people or go out for dinner is not ours anymore. It depends on the Corona infection numbers and the consequences those – at the moment rising – numbers bring about for our everyday life and our work situation. Since mid-March not our mission statement but an illness against which there is no medicine and no vaccine, is what dominates what I do as a pastor and what we do as a church, and the prospect that this will end soon is not at the horizon. We may have to spend autumn and the winter “with the virus” as Angela Merkel said recently. This means the desired “back to normal” the “back to the old normal” is not in sight.

In this crisis we are all beginners and we are all learners. None of us have experiences with this new illness and its consequences. None of us have been through this before. We are all overwhelmed and can only react to what seems to overwhelm the whole world. The consequences for our daily lives change on a sometimes weekly basis – just as the spread of the virus changes, and infection numbers go up or down.

Before Corona Peace Church had a planning meeting at the beginning of the year. We structured our church year, expressed wishes, set goals and looked forward to the events we had planned. In 2020 all is different. From 15 March on churches were closed. During the shutdown I was in church every Sunday. Sometimes alone and with music; sometimes somebody seeking support came along. I knew I would be alone, and it did not affect me much. I had made the decision that I wanted to be there – just in case, and because the church is the place where I belonged on a Sunday. We reopened Peace Church on Pentecost Sunday, our birthday. Then we offered various small worship opportunities. These were of varying success. Again, I experienced times alone in church, not because the church was shut but because nobody came.

Where was people's desire for worship? Where had the sense of community gone? How are we connected? How can we remain connected?

The church people had come up with many great and creative ideas. Just remember the PeaceCast, the music online, the online prayer meeting, the Sunday evening service which is a small gem, the all-age summer Saturdays, the fun packs for the kids, the postcards and the posts on the website and on Facebook and many more...

We are still reacting to the Corona situation and to wants and not-wants of our church people. So for September a new worship schedule will begin. We will stop the Saturday afternoon all-age services. Instead we will think of sending “Sunday School letters” to the kids aged 3 to 12 every Sunday. We may eventually come up with a monthly all-age service at 12 noon on Sundays. But before we do that we have to observe how the infection numbers change as people come back from holidays and as school and kindergartens start again. We will only be able to restart Sunday School and Kids' Club

when schools go back to mixed groups, whole classes and regular running.

We will keep the prayer supper online and encourage people to join this precious little event. And we will continue the beautiful Sunday evening services.

We are hoping to organise a careful and small African Harvest Festival without food or only fingerfood individually wrapped in paper bags, no auction but maybe the sale of the gifts outside – just as in a marketplace. The choir will have to sing from the balcony with 2 metres distance between each singer. All who sing must wear masks. We may be able to serve coffee, if people bring their own cup and take it home again. As you can see: all is unsure, all is open. We all have to try out and see how things go, and whether we like them, need them, want them... In the Council on Ministries we are reviewing church life on a monthly basis and try to make sure that all of our members and friends get the important pieces of information in time. For the Harvest Festival we may have to send invitation cards out with a sign-up slip. We may have to ask people to sign up beforehand which means they have to let us know a week before whether they are planning to come or not.

We will definitely open the Homework Club from 18 September on for school kids aged 10 years and older. We will begin at 2pm and serve individually packaged fingerfood.

We will not be able to open the Monday project for some time, but we must think of an opportunity for people to stay warm when winter comes.

The Council on Ministries will meet at the beginning of September and review, plan and discuss things. Nobody is forced to partake: we will minute the meeting. We want to respect each other's hesitations to come and meet with many people, the fear to use public transport, the wish to run only the absolutely necessary errands and avoid mixing with too many people. We will keep each other in prayers, we can continue thinking of each other, calling each other, sending stuff, and cherish our memories of how it was before Corona, and feed our dreams of how it will be after. God is in there with us, and he has given us a spirit of power, love and mindfulness. We love each other, miss each other, we respect and cherish each other. And we are a community experimenting endlessly to seek and find what is best for us.

## Prayer Supper on Tuesdays – Online

By Cathy Williams

At the end of May I was really pleased to watch the Pentecost service online. How wonderful to be able to worship once more in the church!

However, I was not and still am not really ready to mix with other people. Sometimes I feel I'm being very stupid and wish that I could be as confident as others but we're all different!

I attended the Tuesday Prayer meeting in the church just once probably over a year ago. I was very warmly welcomed by Vanda, Rino, Ronald, Moses, Theo and of course Ian! Afterwards we ate together and chatted. It was a welcome hour or so of quiet before resuming my normal hectic life. However, a month later something else was happening Tuesday at 6pm and I didn't get into the routine of attending.

I was however very pleased when in early June Vanda texted and asked if I would like to join the new online prayer meeting. It is lovely to have the chance, now weekly, to meet others, pray together and hear a meditation, recently the one from the Sunday evening service. This opportunity gives me the chance to still feel part of the church family. If there are others out there who would like to attend, please contact Vanda on 015253259492. You are very, very welcome to listen quietly or if you wish to take a more active part in the meeting. We are now about 10 people.

## Listen to The Peace Band

By Graham Williams



Have you been missing The Peace Band? The band has certainly been missing playing for the Peace Church congregation. However fear not. Through the mysterious ways of modern technology The Peace Band can now be heard by all on SoundCloud.

You will find us on your computers or smart phones if follow these links.

[https://soundcloud.com/the\\_peace\\_band](https://soundcloud.com/the_peace_band) where you can pick and choose songs to play.

Or log on to

[https://soundcloud.com/the\\_peace\\_band/sets/the\\_peace-band](https://soundcloud.com/the_peace_band/sets/the_peace-band) where you can listen to the full play list of 18 songs.

The songs were recorded 'live' in services over the last couple of years mainly for reference purposes but in the current times of need it seemed like a good idea to make them available to the Peace Church community and beyond.

Hopefully you will find some of your favourite songs in the collection to play again and again. The page has been up and running since April, with new songs being added at intervals – although the supply of usable recordings is now just about exhausted.

Through SoundCloud, The Peace Band has already been heard in many countries across several continents. One church in the UK (having asked for permission) even played one of the recordings in their Sunday service recently.

If you are not currently attending church, hopefully the songs will help to lift your spirits and keep you connected. So to finish with the words of our signature song ..... *'may the peace be with you, with you the peace can spread, may the peace go with you, from this day on ahead.'* Happy listening.

## Peace Church Calendar September 2020

### Tuesday 1 September

18h Online Prayer Meeting

### Sunday 6 September

18h Evening Worship

### Tuesday 8 September

18h Online Prayer Meeting

### Sunday 13 September

18h Evening Worship

### Tuesday 15 September

18h Online Prayer Meeting

### Friday 18 September

14h Restart Homework Club

### Sunday 20 September

18h Evening Worship

### Tuesday 22 September

18h Online Prayer Meeting

### Friday 25 September

14h Homework Club

### Sunday 27 September

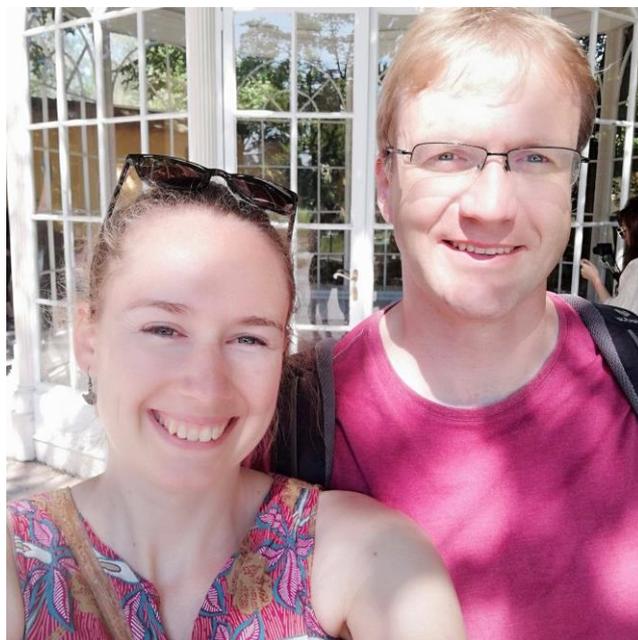
18h Evening Worship

### Tuesday 29 September

18h Online Prayer Meeting

### Saturday 19 September

Wedding of Kat & Christian in North Yorkshire, England



(Join Zoom Meeting at 12:30pm German Time  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81829499010?pwd=Qm9FelZWcDVPMdg1U0N5WINmRzZ3Zz09>  
Meeting ID: 818 2949 9010 Passcode: 775362  
The Zoom livestream will be hosted by Scargill House, who have a license for 100 Zoom participants, so we'd ask you to use one link per household wherever possible.)

## Impressum

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## Invitation to Peace Church Worship in September

**In September we offer 2  
worship opportunities per  
week.**

One on **Tuesday at 6pm** on.  
The group has an online  
service every week.

One on **Sunday evening at 6  
pm** for anybody who likes a  
quiet evening prayer.

We don't "touch" the Sunday  
noon time, until regulations  
become less restrictive again.  
We don't yet know when this  
will be.

In all this, do keep in mind: no  
pressure at all. If anyone feels  
better staying home a little  
longer, this is perfectly fine.  
We all need to be responsible  
for ourselves, make sure we  
feel comfortable and safe with  
what we do.

Check the Peace Church  
website for news and  
inspiration.

