

Psalm 91:9-11

LES Graduation, June 2, 2016

If you make the Most High your dwelling – even the LORD, who is my refuge – then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

Theme: The Most High is your dwelling place

INJ Soccer. Basketball. Volleyball. Softball. Track and field. Wrestling. Football. Baseball. Sports are a big part of our lives. They can be a diversion from more important pressures at school, in the family, at work. Sports can also become pressure on us to perform and to excel. In some ways the competition we pursue in games mirrors the way people interact off the field. Who is better? Let's work together to accomplish a goal. Get the fundamentals right. Listen to the coach. Put in extra time.

The thing about sports is that they are conditional. If you practice. If you are coordinated. If you understand the strategy. Then you will play. If the ball bounces favorably. If the right calls are made. Then you might win. If you are better than others. Then you may move to the next level.

If you don't enjoy it. If you can't walk and dribble. If you don't get the rules. Then you sit the bench. Or, you don't play or watch or follow the sport. And not being interested in a sport is just fine. God gives skills and abilities that include music and math and art and language and tons of other things. We should use them, too.

Yet it remains that ESPN is popular and local sports teams get lots of attention. Some of our favorite conversations are about Green or Blue, about Packers or Lions, about Tigers and Loons and Little League. Who is the best basketball player? The best pitcher or hitter? The best quarterback, receiver, or linebacker? Our Psalm this evening calls God the Most High. The best. At everything. There is no competition at all for the title Most High.

But there is competition. For a place in our hearts. Because all

kinds of things try to be most important to us. Sometimes it is basic necessities like food and sleep. Sometimes it is those enticing things called fame and fortune. Sinful things seem better than the Most High, too. When we choose to follow what is less, what is empty, what is harmful, what is deadly – then we suffer. We are in danger. Our soul is separated from God. We stand under his wrath.

Our life is always a struggle to keep the Most High, most high. The enemy is not just passive, but prowls around like a roaring lion seeking to devour. Where can we be safe? Who can defend us? How can we secure the victory? The Psalmist tells us that when the Most High is our dwelling, then no harm will befall us. When the LORD is our refuge, then no disaster will come near.

The language we memorized in this passage starts with an "if." It sounds like the promise of God is conditional, like the effort in sports. "If" you do this, then God will do that. But there are no conditions to God's promises. They are sure and true, even when we fail on our end of things. It might be a better translation to say, "when" or "because." No harm or disaster will befall you because the Most High is your dwelling. When the LORD is your refuge, you need not be afraid. This passage is a word of God for our comfort!

So, how does the Most High get to be there, your refuge, your dwelling place? My confirmation class knows that we emphasize using the means of grace. The LORD is your refuge when you use the gospel in word and sacrament. You have God's protection through the word, which is the power of God for salvation. The Holy Spirit is at work there so that you know the precious truths that are your comfort: Forgiveness in Christ Jesus; I am with you always; On Eagle's wings; daily bread; risen from the dead. Because the Most High is your dwelling place, no disaster will come near your tent.

Emilee, our graduate, you were taught those truths by your parents. Your school mates and probably most of us experienced the same kind of teaching. Our parents sat and read Bible History lessons to us and they prayed and sang with us. As we came to worship regularly, we repeated songs and words that expressed God's love in Christ. In Sunday School we learned how the LORD intervened to save his people.

The Lutheran Elementary School is a precious place for

extended study of God's Word. The teachers open morning and afternoon with God's Word and prayer. The first hour of each day is spent learning Bible History and the Bible's teachings. But the value of our school for your faith is more than teachers. More than classes. More than memorizing passages and parts of Luther's Small Catechism. More than hymnology and singing in church. More than taking quizzes and tests.

A wonderful blessing of St. Luke's School for these past 25 years is that our dwelling is with the Most High. Parents and students and pastors and teachers and volunteers have God's law and God's gospel message at heart. So the teaching of God's Word goes on in English and Science and Math, and between classes, too. Christian truths are not only taught, but modeled on the playground and in the halls and in teacher-family interactions. When sin becomes known, we use God's law to bring repentance. We speak God's gracious peace for the forgiveness of sins. The word of the Most High is at the center of school and home and church!

Because the Most High is your dwelling place – he is, right? Of course he is, but fierce is the competition for our attention and activity. Especially in the halls of secular education, empty philosophies abound. Not only there, but all over, including from our own heart, the call of self-importance is loud. "I am more important than the Most High!" "What I want is more valuable than the Most High!" The battle wages on in each of us, and it does not fade as we get older. Remember the warning the Israelites needed in our reading to pass the truths on to the next generation!

We need help. More than that, we need a Savior for our many sins of neglecting God's Word. We have that Savior. God sent his Son to be our Substitute. He was perfect in our place. He died for our sin. He gives us the victory. He supplies us with this word for daily living. To begin this service we sang the hymn "In Christ Alone." Our hope is found only in Christ. When he is our safe place, our dwelling, our refuge, we need fear no harm or disaster.

More than that, our passage tells us that the LORD sends his holy angels to guard us in all our ways. Our God does not merely give spiritual help and leave us defenseless against the physical dangers of daily life. His powerful angels guard and keep us. How they do it

and what they do remains hidden to us, but the fact that they are there is comforting. God's holy angels watch over us!

What horrible things never happened to you because God's angels protected you? Which people crossed paths with you at just the right time, for the holy angels did their job? Where were you, when you were reminded of a Bible passage and were restored to a stronger faith? How did that pain or trouble serve for your good? When the Most High is your dwelling, the angels surround you and guard you in all your ways.

We don't get to tell the angels what to do. We cannot see them or even know when they are there. God sends them, and they serve him. We serve the Lord, too, as we hear and learn his word. When we take refuge in him, his promises are our joy. They are a firm foundation for the storms of life. Even when we do face pain and sorrow and disaster and harm, our God does not fail to meet our every need. We have a Savior, and heaven is our home. We have his word, and it gives power for every day. His angels do their job of keeping us in all our ways.

We need the encouragement to make the Most High our dwelling. Remember that the competition is fierce for our attention and our soul! When we give time to sports and all the other activities of our life, it isn't hard to let the Most High slide down the ranks to "sort of mediocre." Especially over Summer, the weeks go by quickly and the Lord our refuge can become "that place we used to go."

Like in sports, then, keep on training, working out, competing against the enemy every day. Use the means of grace. Come to worship. Worship at home. God's gospel is important not just for the summer season, but for all year long. For after Eighth Grade. For parenthood. For all our lives. For eternity. Nothing is better than when the Most High is our dwelling place! " *Because* you make the Most High your dwelling – even the LORD, who is my refuge – then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. SDG Amen.