



Carstairs-Bancroft United Church

January 13, 2021

**DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT
DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

By Rev. Maria Szabo Berces



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Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

As I reflect on the meditation below, images of the mountains remind me one of the most famous Hungarian poets of the 19th century. His name is *Sándor Petőfi*, and just as I, he was brought up on the prairies of Hungary. Although it is not the fact that made him well-known. 😊 He also played a significant role in the 1848-49 revolutions for Hungary's independence. One of his poems – not related to his political view - has the title: "*The Plains*". This became one of his most influential 'landscape' poetry, so much so, that it has remained the part of the Hungarian kids' curriculum to the present days. He expresses in it how he doesn't care about the wonders of the Carpathian Mountains, because "the Hungarian plains are more beautiful and much dearer" (Wikipedia) to him than the snowy peaks.

For the writer of Psalm 121 the emotions about the mountains were quite different. Jerusalem, and the Temple of the Almighty was built on the top of a mountain. Therefore, highlands were connected with the religious experience of belonging to the God of Israel, who watches over and protects his chosen people.

When "**the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom**" (Matthew 27:51) at Jesus' death, which divided the "inner sanctuary, the Most Holy Place" from the rest of the temple, the Almighty opened up the opportunity of belonging to him as 'chosen people' for all peoples of the world. This is why the encouragement of Psalm 121 can be ours, just as it was of those, who walked the long and dangerous way to Jerusalem for worshipping the Creator of the Universe: "**My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. ... the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.**" (verses 2 & 8)

Especially in tough and dangerous times we need to hear this reassurance. It makes a huge difference how we wrestle with the challenges of life if we remember: "*In life, in death, in life beyond death, we are not alone. God is with us.*" (New Creed).

I hope by now many of you remember these words by heart. And I trust that they provide you strength and comfort in times of loneliness and dangers. Because God is faithful, and fulfills all his promises to those love him and call on his name. As it is formulated in the Psalms: "**... the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love...**" (Psalm 33:18); and "**the Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.**" (Psalm 147:11)

We can trust this promise, because they are more stable than the rocks of the mighty mountain peaks (see Matthew 24:35).

Grace and Peace to You All,

Rev. Maria



Lift Up Your Eyes

My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Psalm 121:2

READ PSALM 121

The clouds hung low, blocking the horizon and limiting visibility to only a few hundred yards. The minutes dragged on. The effect on my mood was noticeable. But then, as afternoon approached, the clouds began to break, and I saw it: beautiful Pikes Peak, the most recognizable landmark of my city, flanked on each side by the mountain range. A smile broke over my face. I considered that even our physical perspective—our literal line of sight—can affect our spiritual vision. And I was reminded of the psalmist singing, “I lift up my eyes to the mountains” (Psalm 121:1). Sometimes we simply need to lift our eyes a bit higher!

The psalmist pondered where his help came from, maybe because the hilltops around Israel were dotted with altars to pagan gods and often contained robbers. Or it could have been because the psalmist looked up beyond the hills to Mount Zion where the temple stood and remembered that the Maker of heaven and earth was his covenant God (v. 2). Either way, to worship we must look up. We have to lift our eyes higher than our circumstances, higher than our troubles and trials, higher than the empty promises of the false gods of our day. Then we can see the Creator and Redeemer, the One who calls us by name. He’s the One who will “watch over your coming and going” today and forevermore (v. 8). – By **Glenn Packiam**

REFLECT & PRAY

Dear Father, thank You that You’re the Creator and Keeper—the One who made the heavens and the earth and watches over me. Help me to lift my eyes higher to see You and to put my trust in You. Amen.

How can you “look up” today—beyond your circumstances—to see God? What would it look like to call upon Him for the help you really need?

SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

Psalm 121 is the second of the fifteen “songs of ascent” (Psalms 120-134) which were sung by Jewish pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem for the three great festivals each year (Deuteronomy 16:16): Unleavened Bread (Passover), Weeks (Firstfruits), and Tabernacles. As such, it isn’t surprising that they trust themselves to God’s protection from the dangers and difficulties of the road. Since most traveling was done on foot, Psalm 121:3 anticipates God’s protection from stumbling along the way. Since most journeys by foot took several days, the people had confidence that while they slept along roads that could be dangerous (wild animals, highway robbers), their God didn’t sleep but was alert to their needs (v. 3). They sang of God’s around-the-clock protection: “the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night” (v. 6). This was the God they trusted in and would worship upon arriving in Jerusalem. – By **Bill Crowder**

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