**Sermon Lent 1C**

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**Text:** *Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place – the Most High, who is my refuge – no evil shall be allowed to befall you… (Psalm 91:9-12)*

In preparation for my vicarage year I met with my bishop, the Most Rev. Alan Visser (*requiesat in pacem*). Visser had me prepare for ministry in such-and-such a parish in such-and-such a town; I’ll not soon forget one of his most basic learning goals for my vicarage year: “Learn how to minister to a fearful and disjoined community.” Visser himself, I may surmise, was no stranger to fear and uncertainty. My bishop had survived bouts with cancer; in his own words, it “gave me more than it took from me.” My interactions with him often took the form of riveting conversations over the Book of Revelation (one of the New Testament’s more frightful books). At least as it is often read, as a predictor of a frightening future dispensation. But what propelled Visser forward, rather, was all of Scripture’s promise of resurrection to glory in which he is now confirmed.

Now, my purposes today are neither looking back, nor looking forward. God’s Word is not a tool for forecasting wars, religious revivals, or other socio-political conditions. No; rather, much like our Lord Jesus himself, we are passive participants in the world – when viewed in comparison to our unbelieving neighbours. Good in this world is all they have. Contrariwise, as Jesus positions Himself in today’s Gospel lesson being tempted in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13), we are taught to receive from the hand of the Lord both good and bad (Job 2:10). Only in hindsight do we realize which is which. St. Paul and his most devoted pupil, Bl. Martin Luther, encourage us to wait for the “light of glory” which will dawn upon us when Christ comes again to usher in the new heavens and the new earth. Until then, we must learn “in whatever situation to be content” (Phil 4:11).

Paul writes to the Philippians: “I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” (vv. 12-13) Does this mean that life will be peachy? We already know the answer. One popular work of science fiction coined this maxim: “Fear is the mind killer.” Another Marvel Studios film, one which draws on the Faustian bargain where a young man sells his soul in a bid to rescue his terminally ill father, repeats this line: “You can’t live in fear.” God is God, and we are not. We cannot always have our way. We can and do take precautionary measures, making wise decisions; but some unwelcome changes or outright disasters may still greet us despite our best efforts. But, in the words of that familiar hymn, “the Lord has promised good to me, / His Word my hope secures” (LSB # 744), etc., etc.

Our Introit for today steels us against fear, particularly fear of the unknown with vivid imagery: “Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place – the Most High, who is my refuge – no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.” (Ps 91:9-12) Jesus had learned this Psalm by rote and may well have corrected Satan’s misquoting it. Indeed, memorization of Scripture is a powerful tool against spiritual assault. The important clause is “to guard you in all your ways”, that is, in every external circumstance. Some will test our faith. But there is no reason to fear, for God is our dwelling-place; not only for this life, but “in all generations” (90:1) – beyond this life and even to eternity.