



# Poland Presbyterian Church

*At the Green since 1802*

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## **The Secure Life**

### **Micah 5: 2-5a**

*But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,  
who are one of the little clans of Judah,  
from you shall come forth for me  
one who is to rule in Israel,  
whose origin is from of old,  
from ancient days.*

*<sup>3</sup>Therefore he shall give them up until the time  
when she who is in labor has brought forth;  
then the rest of his kindred shall return  
to the people of Israel.*

*<sup>4</sup>And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord,  
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.  
And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great  
to the ends of the earth;*

*<sup>5</sup>and he shall be the one of peace.*

Many years ago before anti-discrimination laws were in effect, Mrs. Rosenberg was stranded late one night at a fashionable resort on Cape Cod — one that did not admit Jews.

The desk clerk looked down at his book and said, "Sorry, no room. The hotel is full."

The woman said, "But your sign says that you have vacancies."

The desk clerk stammered and then said curtly, "You know that we do not admit Jews. Please try the other side of town."

Mrs. Rosenberg stiffened noticeably and said, "I'll have you know, I have converted to your religion."

The desk clerk said, "Oh, yeah, let me give you a little test. How was Jesus born?"

"He was born to a virgin named Mary in a little town called Bethlehem," she replied.

"Very good," replied the clerk. "Tell me more."

"He was born in a manger."

"That's right," said the hotel clerk. "And why was he born in a manger?"

Mrs. Rosenberg said loudly, "Because some idiot behind a hotel desk wouldn't give a Jewish lady a room for the night! Any more questions?"

"No."

"I didn't think so."

Mr Rosenberg was insisting on one of our basic human needs. We human beings have three fundamental needs. The first is shelter. The second is food and water. And the third is the feeling of security and safety.

The story of Jesus began in a stable, because there was no other shelter. One of the basic needs that all human beings have is for shelter. Humans are not blessed with a thick coat of fur, and consequently our survival is dependent upon being sheltered from the elements.

Our second basic need is for food and water. Deprived of nourishment and water we perish. Throughout Jesus ministry, he shared food with his disciples and with those who followed. The most important ritual that he left centers around food, the simple meal of bread and wine. Two of his most important miracles involved food: turning water into wine and the feeding of the five thousand.

Our third need is a bit subtler, and often we don't pay much attention to it until our other needs are met. **We need to feel secure and safe.**

Most of us, gathered here today have the former needs met. However modest or elegant, we have our homes that provide not only warmth from the cold of winter, but also relief from intense heat of the summer months. The meals on our tables witness to the abundance of food we have. Our needs are more than fulfilled, consequently church organizations like *Habitat for Humanity* and *Bread for the World* are committed to making these basic necessities available to all God's people. Food pantries like ours here in Poland are in communities throughout the country, supporting the diet of people who can't afford food. We support these important efforts as individuals and as a church.

But the third need, security, is often neglected. People do not feel very secure these days. Bombings, terrorism, mass shootings, that are reported and re-reported assault our sense of security. Election season, (which seems to lengthen every four years!) has a way of increasing this sense of insecurity, with candidates telling us that we will not be safe, unless of course, they are elected.

This anxiety and fear grips not only our nation but the world. This sense of insecurity spawns both tyrants and intolerance. When they converge, they victimize people by playing on fears, and thus suck power from institutions, government and even churches. This insecurity is often the root cause of bigotry, conflict, and war. No country ever began a war believing that it was wrong or evil. War is often justified on the basis of "creating security."

The human need for security is also manifest powerfully on a personal level. We live with worry about the future. I chide my colleagues that it is hard to preach (with integrity) from the Sermon on the Mount. Why? Because Jesus instructed his followers to not be "anxious about tomorrow, what you will wear and what you will drink, let tomorrow worry about itself..." (Matthew 6:34) Most of us worry if we will have enough for our retirement and we fight ferociously to insure it. A friend who is a psychiatrist told me that she discourages patients from taking their news from Television, because it is presented in a manner that plays upon fear, anxiety, and lack of security.

We hear the words of Micah the prophet: "And he shall stand and feed his flock....and **they shall live secure..... and he shall be the one of peace.**" The message of Advent and Christmas intersect at this point. Advent is a season of hope, looking to a better day that is coming; indeed a messianic age. This season of Advent requires us to take a realistic inventory, not only of our spiritual condition, but also the world's condition. The Old Testament Prophets (like Micah) were especially effective at this. The Prophets were not happy people. They saw the world as it was. They saw people as they were. And they spoke the truth: God's truth.

But the prophetic message, with all its realism, was also a message of hope, (a realistic message of hope). They did not leave their reader in the valley of despair, rather they pointed to the promises of God; indeed a messianic age that was coming.

Micah was no different. Today, we Christians find his words particularly powerful because he proclaimed that the messianic age would begin in Bethlehem, thus setting the stage for the birth of Jesus. He attributed two characteristics to the messiah: security and peace.

Micah's words are a message for those of us with food and shelter. He speaks to our third need. His is a message of assurance. It assures us that history and indeed the future, is in the hands of God, and that the kingdoms of this world have become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ... He assures us Christ reigns, and we need not fear, we need not worry. We are secure in Christ.

The great 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian, Karl Barth, at the end of his life was on the phone with his lifelong friend Eduard Thurneyson. It was December 9, 1968: Advent. At that time the Americas were experiencing anti-war protests and the civil rights struggle. Europe was in the midst of the student rebellion. Israel and Egypt were staring at each other through rifle sights. They conversed about the gloomy world situation. Then Barth concluded the conversation saying, "But keep your chin up! Never mind!-- He will reign!" (Donald K. McKim, ed. *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1986, p. 35) That evening, Barth died... secure, I am sure, in the hands of God... in the knowledge that Christ reigns.

My message for you five days before Christmas is that indeed, "He reigns!" In the words of Micah:

*And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord,  
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.  
And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great  
to the ends of the earth;  
and he shall be the one of peace.*

Keep your Chin up! Never mind – He will reign! This is the Good News. Amen.