

Psalm 131 Ascents
September 7, 2025

There is a collection of psalms that are gathered under the description, “Songs of Ascents,” which means, of course, “to go up.” They run from the 120th to the 134th. In them we find familiar lines such as:

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help comes from the Lord which made heaven and earth.” Psalm 121

“They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.” 125

“They that sow in tears, shall reap in joy.” 126

“Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman watches in vain.” 127

“Out of the depths have I cried unto thee O Lord, Lord hear my voice; let thine ears be attentive to the sound of these supplications.

If Thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand, but there is *forgiveness with thee*, that thou mayest be *feared*.” 130

Whether it is from the depths or to the skies, these psalms direct one’s attention upwards.

It is the 131st that has been read for us this morning, and is the psalm of the day. Hear it, in the not as familiar as in former days voice of the King James Version:

“Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me.

Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of its mother; my soul *is* even as a weaned child.

Let Israel hope in the Lord from henceforth and forevermore.” 131

In the tradition, these are the songs of worshippers as they ascend the heights of the temple mount on the Lord’s day. We too, have ascended in our way, to the bottom of our little hill, to worship the Lord, for any place of worship is a high place, and to mark the ten years since I have been the pastor of this congregation.

When I came here on that day, it was in my mind to have a series of sermons about what I thought would be the most important ideas of our shared faith - trust, thus the text from Proverbs, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart.” Also gratitude, the refrain from Psalm 136 and other texts mostly in the Old Testament, “Give thanks to the Lord for God is good;” and joy, thus text from Philippians that served us today as the Call to Worship, “Rejoice in the Lord always;”

Of course love, the centerpiece that binds all of the disparate strands of life and faith together, thus the reading from the Gospel of Mark, reciting the great texts from Deuteronomy and Leviticus about the love of God and neighbor.

And hope, which is expressed very powerfully at the end of the 40th chapter of Isaiah, “They shall mount up on wings like eagles, they shall run and not grow weary, they shall walk and not faint;” and in this psalm, the 131st, which has long been one of my favorites.

What catches the attention of some readers is the image of the weaned child which is at peace after having been nourished and convinced of God’s loving care, like that of a mother. But it is the last line that always draws me in;

“O Israel, hope *in the Lord*, from this time forth and forevermore.”

At a particularly important time in my life, I heard these words as an exhortation in the context of the failure of some of the other things in which people, myself included, tend to place their trust and in which they tend to *hope*.

I think of all the important aspects of earthly life, many good things including; family, church, country, nature, money, pleasure, and the list goes on, perhaps in many cases, it is simply abiding faith in our own competence and ability to meet the demands of life.

Sooner or later that self-trust is disappointing, if not shattering.

I can imagine week after week appearing for worship and hearing these words without really hearing them, until things go wrong, and then realizing that hope has been placed in other things. Much if not all of the Bible was written in the face of things gone wrong.

And then to be restored with these lines;

“O Israel (O Church, O thou), put your hope *in the Lord*, from this time forth and forevermore.”

The Pink Brick

Ten years is a long time but it has flown by as if it was very short. We have made it this far together because of our common faithfulness, but more so, because of God’s faithfulness, about which we will sing in a few minutes, before we share Communion.

Each week we take our leave from this place and enter this good and beautiful world which God has made. Given time, however, if we allow, it will involve us in profane things; challenge our self-esteem, confuse and discourage us, anger and frustrate us; it will entice us and draw us away from the things of God, who is our center, and it will exhaust us.

Each week we return to this place, and when we gather, we go up again, ascending to the divine things as they have been revealed to us in scripture, and in

the person of Jesus, who is the Christ; crucified and raised, ascended into heaven to prepare us a place. Part of being lifted up involves a reflecting upon the themes highlighted by the scriptures, read and heard and expounded upon in our hearing today; faith, joy and love, gratitude, and hope.

But each one of these things is an effect and not a cause. The cause is God's Grace; upon which we stand, by which we are saved, and in which we find liberation, forgiveness, and healing, along with other things such as; humility, honor, integrity, courage.

For ten years we have sought to walk together in this calling. It has been an honor and a privilege and a delight. I am grateful to God for your faithfulness and acceptance, and persistent support. It has been a great day with all the music and thoughtful words; and with your presence here. It is like Christmas and Easter, a wonderful day, but in the end words fail us, so it is best to bring them to an end, move on to an observance of the Lord's Supper, and then to food and fellowship together.

Aware that Ascent is a lifelong endeavor, it in fact transcends lifetimes, the only encouragement we dare suggest on a day such as this one, is this, let us keep going up! and take to heart the admonition we find in this Song of Ascent we call Psalm 131,

to, "hope in the Lord, from this time forth and forevermore. Amen.

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