

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
December 31, 2018  
Sermon by Pastor Bart Brauer  
***You're in the eye and under the wing***

—Psalm 17:8

*"Keep me, keep me as the apple of your eye. Hide me, hide me in the shadow of your wings."* A two-for-one. Two beautiful images in a single passage. Both images afford comfort and security to us at New Year's. Both images teach us prayerful trust in God for the coming year.

*Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings.* That's Psalm 17, verse 8, written by David, the shepherd boy, the victor over Goliath, Israel's great general, Israel's greatest king, the accomplished musician and Israel's singer of songs. David, a man who faced great troubles in his life, but who also faced those troubles with prayerful trust in his God. Throughout Psalm 17, David prays and lays before God a number of the threats in his life that were causing him great concern. *The wicked who assail me...my mortal enemies who surround me...the mouths around him that speak with arrogance...people who have tracked me down and now surround me to throw me to the ground...They are like a lion hungry for prey, like a great lion crouching in cover.* One of the fundamental lessons David learned in his life was that the greatest troubles don't just come from abstract adverse circumstances; the greatest troubles come from other human beings, who mean harm and, given the chance, will try to inflict it. David calls them people *of this world whose reward is in this life*. They have no fear of God, so they will do whatever it takes, naughty or nice, to get what they can for themselves out of their present existence. Because as they see it, this is all there is.

Perhaps you have heard of Good Riddance Day. For me, that was a new one this year. I hadn't heard of it before. This past Friday, December 28, was the twelfth annual Good Riddance Day held in New York's Times Square. People wrote down whatever memories from 2018 they wanted to forget and then shredded them. Bad luck, stress, bills, ex-wives, ex-husbands, ex-friends, bad people. Poof! Gone! A fresh start. Or so it would seem. Yes, there is a time for a mindset that leaves the past in the past and moves on. But I hope that we Christians do a lot more than just say "Good riddance!" to the past year.

17 applies to 18. Psalm 17 has something to say to the year now coming to a close. The LORD had his eye on you. That may sound threatening. "The LORD had his eye on me! That means he saw everything I did wrong." And that is of course true. He saw it all. Everything is laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. And you can't just write your sins on a piece of paper and run them through the shredder to get rid of them. That won't work. But if you leave 18 with a troubled conscience, then remember this: the eyes of the LORD that saw a year of your sins are the same eyes that saw the death of his Son, Jesus Christ, 2000 years ago. Jesus died to take away all your sins. You leave 2018 forgiven by a gracious, compassionate, and forgiving God.

But let's go back to the fact that the LORD had his eye on you in 2018. In David's Psalm 17, verse 8, that is not a threatening thought. Not at all. The LORD had his eye on you for your good. He had you under his wing for your good. You prayed to him for his protection, and he granted it. He kept some of us safe through surgery. He kept some of us safe through car accidents. He kept some of us safe through crimes committed against us, and even restored in his own way what other people had stolen. He kept some of our children safe even when they foolishly put themselves in harm's way. He kept all of us safe even when we foolishly or ignorantly placed ourselves in danger. Considering all that could have happened, it's downright amazing that any of us made it to the end of the year alive. Those are some of the protections we knew about. What about the countless protections of our God that we were not even aware of? (Which, by the way, is why it's also good for us to pray for protection and help against the potential dangerous circumstances and dangerous people we do not even know about.) Through it all, God showed himself to be a Savior, just like David expressed: *Show the wonder of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes. We come tonight giving thanks to God for keeping us in his eye and under his wing in 2018.*

17 also applies to 19. Psalm 17 has a lot to say to the new year. You are in the eye. *Keep me as the apple of your eye.* Very literally in David's language it's "the little man, the daughter of the eye." Today we call it the pupil (the Latin word for a little person). The eye's tiny window to the world, in which you can see a tiny image if you look into someone else's eye. The King James Bible 400 years ago translated David's words as "Keep me as the apple of the eye," and the English expression has stuck ever since. The point being: We pray God that he keeps us as the apple of his eye. Precious to him. Of great value and worth to him. To be protected and kept safe at all times and in all ways.

You are under the wing. Think of a momma bird, like an eagle, with her precious eaglets under her broad wings. She enfolds her brood with her wings, protecting them from the cold and the rain, and shading them from the hot sun. Her eagle eyes watch for any threats to her own, and she protects the young ones from predators. Are you going to mess with momma eagle? Only a fool would! We are under God's hand, under his powerful right hand. We

have been baptized in his name—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and he calls us his own. If he is for us, who can be against us? He is our gracious God. And he constantly enfolds us under the care of his gracious, protective wings.

You are in the eye and under the wing. It's worth nothing that David borrowed those images. He read them somewhere and included them in his own thoughts and prayers. You know where he got them? From Moses, from Deuteronomy chapter 32. There Moses wrote: "The LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance. In a desert land he found him...he shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions" (32:9-11). Follow David's example in the new year. Learn God's words in the Bible. Think about them. Remember them. Take them to heart for yourself and pray them back to God. Go to God in prayer with confidence, all the while being committed to doing what is right in God's eyes. God himself has commanded us to pray in this way and has promised to hear us and answer us.

One last thing. We enter any year with the knowledge that this could be our last. We could die. Our death could bring sadness and difficulty to the people we love, people who love us and depend on us. So it is fine and good for us to pray for God to preserve our life on earth, as David also did. But also like David did, we want to keep looking to things eternal, things beyond this life. After all, our gracious God is keeping us in his eye and under his wing for a purpose: to get us through this life of trouble and sorrow and sin and bring us to the day of resurrection. Though David lived a thousand years before Christ, David had Christian faith. Essentially David believed what Christ later promised: "My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn 6). Essentially David believed that God's ultimate will for him was what Christ later prayed for the night before his death: "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory" (Jn 17). So David prayed at the end of his psalm, *And I—in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness*. We share David's faith. The greatest thing ever will be to see God's likeness in person. It will satisfy beyond what we can think or even imagine right now. That's why we are always praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Thank God for 2018. Trust God for 2019. You are in the eye and under the wing.

Please follow along as I read the psalm. When we get to verse 8, please read verse 8 with me, and when we get to the last verse, verse 15, please read that verse with me, too.