

*<sup>7</sup>I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us, and the great favor to the house of Israel that he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. <sup>8</sup>For he said, "Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely"; and he became their savior <sup>9</sup>in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.*

I remember a Saturday morning. Mike my roommate was the editor of the college newspaper. As a loyal friend and roommate each Saturday morning I went with him down to the local newspaper office where we prepared the pages of the coming weeks paper for printing. In those pre-computer days we cut and glued the typed columns onto a galley sheet which was then photographed to produce the printed copies.

This particular Saturday I was feeling more obligated than joyful. For in those pre-woman's rights days, the other twelve guys who lived in Alpha house were gathered at the college gymnasium drafting of good-looking freshman girls who would spend the morning cleaning our rooms, polishing our shoes, washing our cars. It was freshman work day. All the girls were lined up along the side of the gym, the guys from the houses were doing the picking. And I was gluing pictures and columns of print on galley pages.

When Mike and I returned from the newspaper office, the morning was almost gone and my shoes were still unpolished. I went upstairs in the house where Ken Smith was playing his ukulele and entertaining the idle workers. "I need a couple girls, Ken."

"You two, go with him," he directed. And so I met Sue, my wife.

Yes, I remember that Saturday morning.

Yet as I lived it I had no idea how life changing that day would be for me.

In the first lesson this morning the prophet is remembering. "I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord." He calls the people to remember that it has been God's presence that saved them, how he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. Why does he remember? Probably because in the moment in which he was living the hand of God was not so evident.

Most of the time, the hand of God is not evident. As we live life it feels as if life is in our control. I chose to work on the paper that morning; I chose to ask Sue out on a date; I proposed marriage to her. Sometimes the responsibility in that is overwhelming.

Sometimes our decisions result in very difficult consequences. Israel was conquered by her enemies. The people faced exile, harsh conditions.

Decisions we make lead to accidents, loss of jobs, disappointments. We drive the car that is our life and sometimes we just don't see far enough ahead to avoid what will harm us or the ones we love.

Yet the prophet speaks of God who lifted the people up and carried them all the days of old. Through good decisions and bad, through poverty and prosperity, hidden beneath all that was visible in life was the hand of God.

Today God gives us this word from the prophet to help us trust in what we cannot see: God at work in our lives. Always invisible in the present, we can look back and sense what God has done and provided. We see how God in his love and in his pity has redeemed us and lifted us up and carried us all the days until now. In our lives, in moments and decisions God has been our help. What we thought we could not endure we did, strength we did not have in ourselves we received.

We are on the edge of a new year. My habit when I look back is so often to dwell on how I have failed, and what has been lost because of those failings. But this morning as we look back upon the year and years that have been take a moment to think about how God has been your help, blessing you when you have least expected it. This morning you received cards and pencils, now take a moment to write how God has blessed you and lifted you up and carried you. Along with your offerings of money, offer these memories to God, Put your cards in the offering plates as a way of thanking God this day.