

<sup>5</sup> The LORD is gracious and righteous;  
our God is full of compassion.  
<sup>6</sup> The LORD protects the unwary;  
when I was brought low, he saved me.  
<sup>7</sup> Return to your rest, my soul,  
for the LORD has been good to you.

Horatio Spafford wrote the hymn we just sang: *It is well with my soul*. Spafford was a prosperous lawyer and a devout Christian who suffered immense tragedies. Horatio Spafford lost his young son to scarlet fever in 1870, most of his fortune in the Great Chicago Fire in 1871, and then his four daughters in a transatlantic shipwreck in 1873. Miraculously, Spafford's wife Anna survived. Horatio Spafford boarded the first available ship to join his wife. As the captain of the ship informed Spafford of the site where his daughters drowned, Spafford was moved to write the hymn, "It is well with my soul."

We don't exactly know what was going on with the psalmist of our text. We don't even know who the writer of this Psalm is. In the words of our text the psalmist says, "*I was brought low*." In a verse prior to our text the psalmist writes, "*the cords of death entangled me*" (3). Whatever it was that happened to this writer, the situation was life-threatening and brought unrest to his soul. The Psalmist doesn't leave us in suspense, but simply shares the outcome, "*he (this is the Lord) saved me*."

Salvation work is what the Lord, our Savior Jesus, does. Jesus is the lifeguard who saved Peter. You remember Peter walking on water. I wonder how many steps Peter walked, but when Peter started to doubt, Peter began to sink. Thankfully, Peter had the good sense to cry out, "Save me, Lord" and the Lord saved Peter. Jesus is the ultimate lifeguard and Jesus is the great Physician. Jesus healed the sick, abled the disabled and even raised the dead. No trouble was too great for Jesus. No trouble was too small either. When Jesus turned water into wine, Jesus saved the party.

It is worth noting that all these saving acts, including the one referenced by our psalmist, were preceded by a request. The story is told of a boy who was clearing a field for his father. The boy came across a large rock and did his best to lift the rock, but it wouldn't budge. He pushed. He pulled. He grunted. He growled. He hemmed. He hawed, but there was no moving that rock. Soon, his father came along and asked if he had used all of his available strength. And when the boy answered, "yes, I have," the father responded, "No, you haven't because you haven't asked me."

"Oh, what peace we often forfeit. Oh, what needless pain we bare, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer." The Lord hears. The Lord helps too. The psalmist reminded himself and so reminds us, "*Return to your rest, my soul, for the Lord has been good to you*."

Sometimes we can be tempted to feel like God is out to get us. When bad things happen, I can wonder why God doesn't love me. You might wonder, why isn't God helping me? But not everything that looks bad is bad. The kids need shots. You love them, but it doesn't really look that way when you are holding them down while the doctor administers the shot. Are shots "bad"? Or you need surgery. It's going to hurt and it's going to take some time to heal, but your doctor cares about you and how your surgery turns out. Is surgery "bad"?

Good Friday certainly didn't look good to the disciples. Jesus was falsely accused of breaking the law. He was whipped, mocked and executed on the cross. This was really bad for Jesus, but we call it Good Friday because on this day and because of the cross all of our sins and guilt was taken away.

“The Lord is gracious and righteous,” as our Psalmist wrote. That first half of verse five was true of every day in 2025 and will be true every day in 2026. Each day is a gift of the Lord’s grace. Every sin we committed in 2025 has been forgiven and every sin we commit in 2026 has been forgiven too. And Jesus is always able to deliver the forgiveness of sins to us because Jesus was always righteous on our behalf. Jesus did the time for our crimes by righteously living under the law in our place. Jesus paid for our penalties by offering his righteous, holy, innocent blood on the cross on our behalf.

The Lord is gracious and righteous. There is never a day when the Lord is not gracious and righteous. The same is true about God’s compassion. Our God is full of compassion. Jesus sees the world as sheep who are without a shepherd. Jesus laments over those who reject his invitation to follow him. Jesus understands our weaknesses. What touches our hearts, touches his heart. When Jesus came to the tomb of his friend Lazarus, Jesus wept as we weep over the loss of our friends.

Our God is full of compassion. And finally, “the Lord protects the unwary.” We have the invitation, *“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened.”* This standing invitation also includes the promise, *“And I will give you rest”* (Mt 11:28). Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the protecting shepherd who promises, *“no one will snatch them out of my hand,”* (Jn 20:28) and promises again, *“no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand”* (Jn 20:29). *“I will be with you always,”* was not just a promise for the apostles, but for all believers who will live, *“to the very end of the age”* (Mt 28:20).

Life is a fragile time on this earth. We might feel reasonably comfortable that we will make it another 365 days in 2026 as we have now made 365 days in 2025, but the Lord in his wisdom might call us home. Or we might feel this year is going to be it for us, but the Lord in his wisdom has many more years planned for us. Our times, the Bible says, are in his hands. And in his hands there is no better place for us to be. In his hands, the hands that created us and redeemed us and sanctified us, we see God’s goodness. In his hands our souls find rest. Amen.