



Second Sunday in Lent

February 28, 2021

* *Please stand if you are able*

Prelude “Glory Be to Jesus”

Gathering

Welcome and Lighting the Christ Candle

Acolyte: Jesus Christ is the Light of the World. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot put it out.

Call to Worship

Liturgist: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from the words of my groaning?

**All: My God, I cry out by day, but you don't answer,
by night, but I find no rest.**

Liturgist: Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the praise of God's people.

**All: In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted you and you delivered them.
They cried to you and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not disappointed.**

Psalm 22:1-5

* **All Singing: 405 “O God Our Help in Ages Past”**
Singing verse 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6

God's Greeting
God's People Greeting One Another

Reconciliation

Liturgist: You brought me out of the womb;
 you made me feel secure on my mother's breast.
From birth I was cast on you;
 from my mother's womb you have been my God.

**All: Do not be far from me,
 for trouble is near and there is no one to help.**

Liturgist: I am poured out like water,
 and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax,
 it has melted within me.
My mouth is dried up
 and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
 you lay me in the dust of death.

**All: But you, Lord do not be far from me.
 You are my strength; come quickly to help me.**

Psalm 22:9-19 adapted

Silent Confession and Lament

All Singing: 439 "I Love the Lord; He Heard My Cry"

Liturgist: The poor will eat and be satisfied;
 those who seek the Lord will praise him –
 may your hearts live forever!

**All: All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord
 and all the families of the nations will bow before him.
 for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.**

Liturgist: All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
 all who go down to the dust will kneel before him –
 those who cannot keep themselves alive.

**All: Future generations will be told about the Lord.
 They will proclaim his righteousness,
 declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!**

Psalm 22:26-31 adapted

*** All Singing: 511 "Amid the Thronging Worshipers"**

Proclamation

Prayer for Illumination

**All: O Lord our God, your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.
 Give us grace to receive your truth in faith and love, that we may be
 obedient to your will and live always for your glory; through Jesus Christ
 our Savior. Amen**

Scripture: Psalm 22

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?
My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.

Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.
In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.
To you they cried out and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by everyone, despised by the people.
All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.
“He trusts in the Lord,” they say,
“let the Lord rescue him.
Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him.”

Yet you brought me out of the womb;
you made me trust in you, even at my mother’s breast.
From birth I was cast on you;
from my mother’s womb you have been my God.

Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.

Many bulls surround me;
strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.
Roaring lions that tear their prey
open their mouths wide against me.
I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted within me.
My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.

Dogs surround me,
a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce my hands and my feet.
All my bones are on display;
people stare and gloat over me.
They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.

But you, Lord, do not be far from me.
You are my strength; come quickly to help me.
Deliver me from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dogs.
Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;
save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you.
You who fear the Lord, praise him!
All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!
For he has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help.

From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;
before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows.
The poor will eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the Lord will praise him—
may your hearts live forever!

All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,
for dominion belongs to the Lord
and he rules over the nations.

All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.
Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.
They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!

Minister: The Word of the Lord.
All: Thanks be to God.

Sermon: Singing with the Choir

*** All Singing: 562 “We Will Extol You, God and King”**
Singing verses 1 and 4

Dedication

Prayers of the People

*** All Singing: 943 “God Be with You Til We Meet Again”**

Benediction

Postlude

Worship Leaders

Organist: Dora Diephouse
Pianist / Vocalist: Erin Pacheco
Sound / Video: Schuyler Roozeboom
Minister: Roger Nelson

9:00 AM Service

Acolyte: Moriah Dykstra
Liturgist: Dan Diephouse
Prayer: Mark Dykstra
Vocalists: Lisa, Karis & Moriah Dykstra

10:15 AM Service

Acolyte: Hulford

Liturgist: Nate Pettinga

Prayer: Liz Hulford

Vocalists: Jan Kosmal & Jackie Archer

Guitarist: Jeremy Hulford

Hymns are from *Lift Up Your Hearts* (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013)
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Text: Psalm 22
Title: Singing with the Choir
Date: 02.28.21
Roger Allen Nelson

During college and seminary, I worked as a CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant). While my classmates were leading Bible studies or honing preaching skills, I was changing bedpans and giving baths. And, while working at a little rural hospital I watched Virgil Rowenhorst die.

Mr. Rowenhorst was in his mid-fifties. After a successful run as a banker, he became President of Northwestern College. He was a family friend and liked college kids, so as he was dying of an aggressive cancer his family hired me to keep him company and attend to his needs during the nights. I read to him,

watched him sleep,
prayed with him,
swabbed his dry lips,
listened to him careen in and out of lucidity,
and in the middle of the night,
in the silence of a small hospital,
I heard him cry out to God, "O God, help me! O God! O God, please. God help me."

It was raw, stripped-bare, desperate, anguished.

In a room that smelled like cancer, he'd get more morphine and drift back to sleep. In the room across the hall there was a woman in her thirties in a permanent vegetative state from a car crash. God wasn't coming to save either of these saints. There was no help or healing. There was nothing but silence. To a guy in his early twenties, it felt God-forsaken.

Dear friends, we're all going to die. "Remember that you're dust and to dust you shall return." I didn't expect God to swoop in and beat back cancer in the last hours of life, and there were probably other ways that God was present in this death, but for this young-impressionable-soul it was also a glimpse into the dark night of the soul. It was a window into a heart-broken-wide-open and longing for some expression of mercy, or help, or just the fleeting reassurance that we're not alone.

Many of us, most of us, know (or will know) a similar experience.

At the death of a child, in the throes of an addiction, in a battle with depression, in loneliness and isolation, in genocide or rape or child abuse, in some moment of despair, or desperation, or death it will all seem God-forsaken....

Do you know what I mean?

Can you remember, revisit, sit with that experience when you were stripped bare and all you could cry out was:

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?
My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.*

As you probably know, when Jesus hung on the cross he reached back into the songbook of his people and he cried out those haunting opening lines of Psalm 22. In fact, in the Gospel of Mark that cry of abandonment is the only word that Jesus speaks from cross. And then, the rest of Psalm 22 includes other images that are reflected back in the crucifixion. For example:

7 *All who see me make and hurl insults at me, shaking their heads. "He trusts in the Lord," they say, "let the Lord deliver him."*

15 *My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; You lay me in the dust of death.*

16 *They pierce my hands and feet...*

18 *They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.*

But while those images appear in the crucifixion the line, the song, that Jesus cries out is of being forsaken, stripped bare, alone...

So, what shall we sing?

I guess, first, we would acknowledge that the experience of lament, loss, or despair is not an aberration. It's not the fault of the individual. It's not a test. It's not a failure of faith. Feeling abandoned by God is part of the human experience. And a heart-wrenching cry is as much a part of faith as conviction is a part of faith.

In calling out to God, Jesus joins the company of the afflicted and forsaken. He becomes one with us in our suffering. He identifies with or finds solidarity with Virgil Rowenhorst. Or maybe, in reciting that opening line he gives us permission or encouragement to pray for help, to hold up the worst of life to God.

Jon Hiskes, a young friend, father, writer, and former Hope worshipper, had an essay published recently about the frustration and anger he's felt for the last year. At one point he acknowledges reading through the Psalms in the hopes that it would give solace or offer perspective. He writes this:

I had hoped to appreciate the elegant poetic structure of individual psalms, but instead I was struck by the opposite: taken together, they form an unruly jumble of praise and fury, of contentment and despair, of calm and desperation. For every image of quiet waters, there is a wish to smash the heads of babies of one's enemies. That tells me that anger is not secondary but somehow fundamental to our identities as created beings. We are made with not only eyes to see but with blood that can boil in response to what we know to be wrong about the world.

That's not despair, but it is recognition that the whole range of human experience and expression is part of what we sing. Dear friends, let us not deny, doubt, or down play that anguish and anger are part of the human song.

Now. There's a turn in Psalm 22. The psalmist doesn't stay stuck in despair but turns toward praise of a rescuing God. The psalm moves from the utter abandonment of its opening lines to exuberant, full-throated praise in its final strains. That's quite a turn.

A little aside....

Some scholars think that Jesus quotes Psalm 22 from the cross because he's pointing toward the coming rescue. As if, while dying, he signals that he's not actually despairing because the end of Psalm is a celebration of what God will do.

That seems a stretch to me and it belittles the abandonment that Jesus experiences as some sort of religious theater. One New Testament scholar dismisses the premise that Jesus is actually drawing our attention to the rest of Psalm 22 with this line, "When you're hanging on a cross, you are not at the same time holding a Bible study."

So, what of the turn in Psalm 22?
What of the movement?

I guess the closest thing we have to a moment of rescue is verse 19.

19 *But you, Lord, do not be far away from me.
 You are my strength; come quickly to help me.*

Because from then on, the psalm is a building chorus.
Listen to all who are called to join in praise of God:

23 *You who fear the Lord, every seed of Jacob and every seed of Israel*
25 *the great assembly (or congregation)*
26 *those who seek the Lord*
27 *all the ends of the earth and all the families of the nations*
29 *all the rich and all those down in the dust*
29 *all who cannot keep themselves alive (the dead)*
30 *Posterity (literally, seed, again) and future generations*
31 *a people yet unborn*

Dear friends, notice how the choir swells and swells. From the people of Israel, to the *goyim* (the other nations), to the ends of earth, to the rich and the poor, to the dead, to those yet to be born. The psalm moves from a cry of one forsaken to a big-tent choir with all voices raised.

It is a jarring movement....
It is a remarkable turn....

Maybe this is a helpful image...

Joellen Walker carried more than one could or should. She had a beautiful daughter killed, lost a son, and grandchildren were taken by drugs and violence. She suffered from arthritis that mangled her hands and crippled her walk. But with tears running down her cheeks, and a smoky-husky voice over little more than a sparse piano, I heard her sing, "Trouble in my way, I have to cry some time...."

And then after a few verses this mangy choir would stand to join in support. And as the music rose up folks in the congregation start to hum and sing along. Then a few would stand to join in. And before you knew it felt like the dead and the unborn were singing along.

Now. I know there is a ritualized pattern and cultural practice at play, but somehow in that moment we moved from despair to praise. And Joellen would sing out, "I lay awake at night, but that's awright, cause I know Jesus'll fix it after a while."

Dear friends, I don't know how to hold Psalm 22 all together, except to recognize that a biblical spirituality gives voice to despair. Looks it full in the face. Doesn't flinch or pretend. But eventually it also finds some movement. It doesn't stay there.

A biblical spirituality holds the ashes but believes in resurrection.

A biblical spirituality is honest about the horror but hopes in redemption/rescue/*shalom*.

A biblical spirituality cries out to God in the present, recites and remembers God's activity in the past, and trusts God with the future....

What song shall we sing?

Let us sing an honest song and have the courage to cry out to God. May we have open hearts and sensitive spirits to sit with those who are forsaken. No matter how long it takes move. And may we join voices with Jew and Gentile, male and female, gay and straight, those who have gone on ahead and those yet unborn. This morning may we join voices even with Virgil Rowenhorst, Joellen Walker, Hetty Soodt, and the babies in womb....

*For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him,
but has listened to his cry for help.*

Amen.