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Psalm 130

WAITING IN THE DEPTHS

One of the things about the Bible that constantly impresses me is how this ancient, ancient set of texts can still speak so profoundly to us today. Despite the passage of thousands of years, despite our living in radically different contexts, despite the fact that we drive cars and fly people into space, and communicate through screens with people who are possibly thousands of miles away, despite all of these radical differences, the ancient biblical texts can still resonate with us modern humans.

Psalm 130 is just such an example. Psalm 130 might have been written as much as 3,000 years ago. But the what the writer says in this psalm, the writer's sentiments and anguish, could easily have been written by someone yesterday. "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!" A contemporary rendering of this passage reads like this: "Help, God—the bottom has fallen out of my life! Master, hear my cry for help! Listen hard! Open your ears! Listen to my cries for mercy." (Peterson, *The Message*)

The writer of the psalm then goes on to talk about waiting anxiously and eagerly for God's word. The psalmist states, "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in God's word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning."

Who among us cannot relate to this—to those sleepless nights of anguish when your mind is so occupied with your distress that it cannot shut off or calm down and allow for sleep? It's just racing through the problem and there is no way to stop it. And you wait for the

morning. You wait for the morning to come, when with the morning light the problems will perhaps not seem so foreboding, or maybe simply so you can rise from your bed and occupy your mind with the duties and tasks of the day. Or when we've waited by the hospital bed of our loved one all night long, waiting for the morning, waiting for the doctor to come and deliver some kind of news. We've been there. We know what that feels like. And so it seems does this ancient ancestor who wrote this psalm long ago. He or she knows what that feels like to endure the depths of distress, waiting for the morning, waiting for God to answer, waiting for hope and relief.

We can feel this writer's agony, his or her effort to see God through the darkness of pain, because we've been there ourselves. This reality of the human condition transcends decades and centuries and millennium. We all know what it is like to find ourselves in the depths for one reason or another.

And this is not only true for us as individuals but also for communities. Whole groups of people know what it is like to be in the depths, to cry to God for help, to wait with longing for God: those who have endured centuries of oppression, those living in poverty, those waiting in refugee camps and detention centers, who see no way out of their circumstances for themselves or their children.

The writer of the psalm also seems to acknowledge that sometimes the depths in which we find ourselves arise from our own *iniquities*—which is a fancy way of talking about our misdeeds, our sins, our brokenness. Sometimes we find ourselves in the depths of pain and darkness because of our own actions and behaviors. And we cry to God for help.

And this is also true for communities as well as for us as individuals. A recent news story revealed the discovery of the remains of 215 indigenous children found at a former

Canadian residential school. These children's remains bear witness to human evil and cruelty and atrocities. They bear witness to the depths of darkness to which humans are capable of sinking. As horrified as we are by this particular account, we must remember that there is no group of people, no nationality, no culture, that is immune from evil, and cruelty, and atrocities against others. All humans seem to be capable of sinking into the depths of inhumanity. The writer of the psalm understood this when he or she wrote, "If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?" And so, when we open the paper and watch the news and witness the depths of darkness in which we humans find ourselves, we join our ancient cousin in crying aloud to God, "Help us, O God, for the bottom has fallen out of our lives!"

But after this ancient cousin of ours, the writer of this psalm, acknowledges that part of the reason we find ourselves in the depths of pain and distress lies with human sin and specifically his or her own sin, the psalmist then acknowledges a life-saving truth. The writer states, "but there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered," so you may be worshipped. And then the psalmist encourages us to have hope. "Hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with God is great power to redeem."

The writer affirms that ugliness and cruelty and sin and brokenness are not the only reality in this world. For there is a source of goodness in this world, and it comes from God. There is a source of healing in this world, and it comes from God. There is a source of forgiveness in this world, and it comes from God. There is a source of hope in this world, and it comes from God. The psalmist believes that God is the source of unfailing love and grace for us and this broken world. And God desires to redeem us, to fix us, to heal us.

And believing this to be true, the psalmist, sitting there in the depths of great pain, can only wait with great longing and cry for God's forgiveness, God's healing, God's redemption to come. The psalmist must wait.

Now a word about "waiting." The concept of waiting in the Bible is not a passive activity. When we wait in the doctor's office, we flip through a magazine or watch the weather on the waiting room TV, or pull out our phones and catch up on some emails. We might be doing something while we wait, but none of this activity is really directed toward the person we are waiting for. We must passively wait until our name gets called.

But in the Bible, waiting usually involves being active and attentive and connected to the thing you are waiting for—which, in the Bible, is usually God. The writer of the psalm draws a comparison between his or her waiting for God and the kind of waiting the night watch person does when scanning the skies for the first rays of sunlight. This kind of waiting is involved and participatory.

After Mother Teresa died and her personal diaries were discovered, much of the world was shocked to learn that this revered woman of faith had long periods of time, distressing periods of time, when she felt God was absent. She yearned and longed for God's presence to fill her again. But notice what she did during those long periods of time when God seemed so absent to her. She fed the hungry. She tended to the sick. She touched the outcasts. She gathered into her homes and hospitals those who were destitute. That is how Mother Teresa waited for God even when she found herself in the darkest depths.

There are all kinds of people in this world sitting in great depths of pain and despair, scanning the skies for some sign of the morning light, waiting for some sign of hope. But what if, what if *you* are the morning light that God offers to this world and to those around you?

Maybe the love, the compassion, the forgiveness, and the hope of God that people are yearning to know can be given by you and me. I wonder if you think back to times when you found yourself in the depths, if there might have been someone who offered God's morning light to you as you waited. And you received hope.

Even as the psalmist sat in his or her own depths of great pain, this ancient cousin reaches across the millennium to become the morning light we need today, splashing God's rays of sunlight into our darkness with this message: "Hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with God is great power to redeem."