

Psalm 130

A Song of Ascents.

¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

² Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!

³ If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

⁵ I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in God's word I hope;

⁶ my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷ O Israel, hope in the LORD!

For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with God is great power to redeem.

⁸ It is the Holy One who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

What does “ascending” look like in our lives? From what must we ascend and to what? Even as the ascending of Hebrew pilgrims is a physical journey up to Jerusalem and the temple, clearly for the psalmist this is a spiritual journey and a highly personal one also. Psalm 130 speaks of depths, and these depths have to do with some form of suffering and distress, and it may be very personal but also representative for the people as a whole. We are suffering and in distress, O God, and we have suffered painful loss. We need redemption, which is freedom and which is peace. We interpret what has happened to us as, perhaps, some form of punishment as well, and therefore, forgiveness must also be part of the redemption we are crying out for...

Have you ever been afflicted by thoughts and feelings that perhaps your suffering and distress may have roots in things you have said, done and thought, or things you have failed to do or have neglected, and are, therefore, responsible? We feel responsibility and even guilt because we care. But it is unfortunate when such feelings make us stuck, lead to darker feelings like shame, and even to paranoia as we see much that happens to us as some kind of karma or fate coming back to us.

In the case of this psalm, however, the psalmist is proactive in engaging their distress and calling on God to act, to forgive and to redeem. The psalmist also believes that God is one who does

forgive and redeem. They believe this firmly and so the “crying up” (persistent, focussed prayer from the heart) to God. God is a God of “steadfast love” who has the “power to redeem” the psalmist and the people from all their “iniquities” imagined and real.

But there is something more. A key word in this psalm is “waiting.” “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in God’s word I hope; my soul waits more than those who watch for the morning...” The night is long, the suffering and distress have been part of our lives a long time... It is all too easy to lose hope, to get paranoid and to internalize what is happening as somehow tied up with some kind of karmic fate. But waiting in hope is staying strong, believing that redemption will come. Waiting is actively engaging the possibilities, even when pursuing any path requires courage, risk and openness to what can yet be.

But how do we find the motivation and faith to wait actively like this? This psalm is trying to instill such a posture of prayer and waiting in anticipation of redemption in the people. You are not alone. God is listening. Others are with you too. In fact, many of us are in this together. We will get through this and come out the other side. Then we will be able to compose psalms of thanksgiving and prayers for freedom knowing that freedom will come again as it has come in the past... We will be able to sing songs and tell stories about it...

And so, psalm 130 has been a favourite of many who have suffered distress. It breathes hope to those who have lost it, and it proclaims possibilities for those who can hang in there and wait rather than get too far sucked in by the negativity of self-sabotaging paranoia and shame. Hold on to this psalm and pull it out of the drawer of your spiritual resources from time to time. For even if this time may be a good time for you, there will come a time when psalm 130 will be the exact psalm you need to read, pray and internalize.

PRAYER: Thank you, O God. We thank you for all the blessings in our lives for all the challenges. We also thank you that we can “cry up” to you in our suffering and distress. May you grow in us fresh faith and hope that such praying is not futile, that you not only listen but come alongside us and within us to strengthen and empower us toward healing, renewal and wholeness. Even as wholeness is a lifelong journey, we crave some relief and joy in our lives along the way. We desire some abundance and some peace in all our relations. We desire some clarity in situations and the grace to speak truth with kindness in relationships. We need patience and perseverance to hang in there with people and support them even as we ourselves also need support... Meet us in the particulars of our lives, O God, as we wait for your redemption once again. In Jesus’ name; Amen.