

Lent 5, Sunday 29 March 2020

'Depth' (Psalm 130)

The Reverend Zoë Browne

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord;

² Lord, hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive

to my cry for mercy.

³ If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,

Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But with you there is forgiveness,

so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

⁵ I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,

and in his word I put my hope.

⁶ I wait for the Lord

more than watchmen wait for the morning,

more than watchmen wait for the morning.

⁷ Israel, put your hope in the Lord,

for with the Lord is unfailing love

and with him is full redemption.

⁸ He himself will redeem Israel

from all their sins.

THE CRY

Have you ever yelled so loud, so hard and so deep that it shakes your core, but not felt like anyone was listening? This cry may have only lasted a moment, but it may have lasted a day, a week, a month, or even years?

On Tuesday morning, I went for a calm stroll with my border collie, Zac. Sunshine, exercise, social distancing, even a take away coffee. It was a good chance to enjoy the 'season' of our day off.

Not far from home, the season of the day changed very quickly. Zac was attacked, unprovoked, by a rather large and unrestrained dog wandering outside his fence. Now before I go on, I just want to say that Zac is OK now. It didn't last for long, and we have an amazing team of local vets who've looked after him.

Nonetheless, in that moment, all I could do was yell. Scream, cry, wail. Whatever you want to call it. Logic told me not to intervene; that would've been bad news for both me and Zac. So I yelled. It was a guttural scream that came from the depths of my very soul.

But as I yelled, I felt hopeless. There was no guarantee that anyone would be there. Who was going to answer me? There was no-one on the street, I was walking by myself. I didn't know who would hear. I wasn't hopeful, I was simply desperate.

As brief as that space was the other day, it made me reflect on the times when we experience those same depths – the cry that comes with the grief of loved ones unwell or dying, the loss of livelihoods, a soccer team of young boys trapped in a cave, miners in a collapsed mine, the uncertainty of the world that we feel in these days here and now. Whatever the reason, I'm certain that we have all cried that cry from the very depths of our soul at some point in our lives.

The opening lines of our reading this morning share that very same guttural cry. V1:

¹ *Out of the depths I cry...*

The original language says – *The song from the depths of the depths is what I cry.* Coming from the very deepest of places, the psalmist tells us that this cry is part of the human experience; it is a prayer, a lament, a pain that resides in the core of his heart; it is a prayer and a pain that he shares with you and me.

While the cry that came out on Tuesday morning was brief, probably less than a minute, there are times in our lives where our souls may cry out for days, weeks or months. Sometimes it can seem like the cry is overwhelming and all-consuming. I think it's fair to say that some aspects of life now seem to be an all-consuming cry.

And what these cries do, no matter how short or long, is to steal the life from our life. So often we cry out and feel that there is no solution, no hope, no guarantee.

We may genuinely feel as if there is no hope to our cries, no response to be heard. But when we look to our psalm today, we can see in fact that the psalmist's cries, and our own, are heard. In the cry, there is hope, because it is not just a melancholic lament; it is a conversation.

¹ *Out of the depths I cry... to you, Lord;*

² *Lord, hear my voice.*

Let your ears be attentive

to my cry for mercy.

The force of the psalmist's despair is clear. But we can't ignore that he is directing it clearly to God. It is a cry as well as a petition, a calling upon. He is unashamedly asking God for help. He asks God to hear him and comfort him by his mercy.

Asking for help is not always a natural instinct. If you're like me, and ridiculously stubborn, it's frustrating to have to ask for help. Even more so, it's humbling to ask someone who you're know you're not in the best standing with.

This is exactly what the psalmist expresses when he says in v.3:

³ *If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,*

Lord, who could stand?

It's like the teenager coming up to the parent and saying 'hey, Dad, so I know I probably don't deserve it after I ignored your directions, but I'm in trouble..... could you help me? It's like the prodigal son when he realizes he's totally stuffed up. This kind of crying out, when you also must eat some humble pie, is beyond hard. Sometimes I think it'd be easier to cry out to the nothingness of the sky, to think there was no one there to help, than to swallow my pride and ask for help from someone who I've not always done the right thing by.

THE HOPE

But while we see the guts of the psalmist's heart in his opening lament, this cry is coupled not with powerlessness, but with hope.

The conversation changes course, and as quickly as he calls out from the depths, we see the beauty of hope that comes from God.

⁴ *But with you there is forgiveness,
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.*

⁵ *I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.*

⁶ *I wait for the Lord
more than watchmen wait for the morning,
more than watchmen wait for the morning.*

Rather than hiding from God, the psalmist encourages us to speak out of the depths and to latch onto the beauty, the forgiveness, the grace that God offers.

We have all journeyed through seasons of depth, and seasons of joy. If we were to reflect on these times, ask the question: Is it us ourselves who have brought us from despair into hope? Have we been the solution to our own depths? We cannot solely rely on humanity, or on ourselves, to save us. If I had to bring myself hope in the face of trial, I think I'd be resigned to a life of despair. Some days it is hard enough to keep my head above water, let alone bring myself out of it.

But this is where the best news lies – it is not dependent on us to be the solution to our own problems. It is God who offers the solution to us. Like the psalmist tells us – *my **whole being waits for the LORD, and in his **word** I put my hope.*** Another way of translating this is *on his **word** I wait.*

The word here for word, *haddabar*, is one used often in the Old Testament, normally in relation to the **word of the LORD**. God's message came through his word. In the New Testament, **word** is often used about Jesus, who becomes **the word of the LORD**, not just in name or prophecy, but in the flesh. The psalmist invokes the idea that he waits on the word of the LORD, on Jesus. In the word of the LORD, in Jesus, he puts his hope.

When we read about the watchmen, it's drawing an image of watchmen who stood guard on city walls. They didn't know if or when someone would attack. It was a shift through the

night that filled with anxiety. There were no guarantees of safety. However, the one certainty was the morning. Morning would always come, and by that hope they knew they were safe.

So the psalmist is describing to us how fervently he waits – more than the watchmen wait for the morning. Just as the morning is guaranteed to come, so too is the LORD. In this assurance, the psalmist doesn't wait in resignation. He waits in anticipation! He waits in hope! So much so he ends the prayer by telling the Israelites to do the same:

*⁷ Israel, put your hope in the Lord,
for with the Lord is unfailing love
and with him is full redemption.*

*⁸ He himself will redeem Israel
from all their sins.*

THE WATCH

Friends, while it may feel like it some days, the depths are not the end; they are a season. As surely as the psalmist cries out from the depths of the depths, so he moves to a place where he can wait in the surety of God's loving kindness. He knows that as dark as it feels today, God will redeem us by his unfailing love.

How much more can we rejoice in the knowledge that regardless of the depths that we face, we can wait and watch in anticipation? We can be sure by the word of the LORD, by Jesus, that we can access God's unfailing love and his full redemption.

As we journey through the Psalms towards Easter, from the depths of the human experience to the triumphs of Jesus' resurrection, we are reminded that our faith is a faith of relationship, of conversation. God so wanted relationship that he became human for us, and gave up his life for us. When we cry out, our cries do not go unheard. They are not futile or helpless. They don't require us to be the solution to our own problems. God alone is our refuge and our hope. Now, more than ever, should we hold fast to this. Even more certain than the sun will rise is the truth that God is our hope and our refuge. Today, whether we stand on the mountain or in the depths, let's wait for the Lord, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

Amen.