

Third Weekend After Pentecost (B/RCL): "In the Pits/Out of the Depths I Cry to You" (Psalm 130)
Psalm 130
June 9-10, 2018
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

"I'm in the pits." Not really! But **that's** how the author of this weekend's psalm feels.

*Out of the depths
I cry to you, O LORD.
(Psalm 130:1)*

The sense of it is, "It doesn't get worse than this, Lord! I'm in the depths of the sea, at the bottom of the ocean, my feet tangled in seaweed, an anchor around my neck. I'm in an impossible bind, totally powerless to save myself, an 'nth away from drowning." Here's how *The Message* puts it:

*Help, God – the bottom has fallen out of my life!
Master, hear my cry for help!*

That opening phrase, "out of the depths," is how this psalm gets its Latin name *De profundis*. In German that's *Aus Tiefer Not*, the title of Martin Luther's hymn based on Psalm 130 and included in our ELW (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* #600), aptly named *Out of the Depths I Cry to You*. Luther loved Psalm 130; those who know these things say it was one of his favorites, shown by the fact that he put it to music so the people could hold it close to their hearts. (You've probably noticed it's easier for us to remember what we sing.) Luther thought it was important for people of faith to know this psalm because it's an Old Testament Gospel-in-miniature: sadly, it is in our human nature to sin and gladly, it is in God's divine nature to forgive.

I'm not sure if our Methodist friends down the street are saying or singing Psalm 130 this weekend, but if you know one of them you might want to ask ☺. It is special to them as well. Earlier in the day that John Wesley had his spiritual "Aha!" moment, his "Aldersgate experience," when he said his heart was "strangely warmed within" him, he had heard Psalm 130 sung at

Westminster Cathedral. It was his reminder that, as John Newton, the author of *Amazing Grace* once said, "I am a great sinner but I have an even greater Savior."

The heart of Psalm 130 are these verses:

*...with you is forgiveness...
With the LORD there is steadfast love;
with the LORD is plenteous redemption.
(Psalm 130:4a, 7)*

So what's the connection between forgiveness and being in the pits? Crying out of the depths? The psalmist tips us off that the reason for his angst, the catalyst for his crisis, is his own sin, when he asks and answers:

*If you were to keep watch over sins,
O LORD, who could stand?
Yet with you is forgiveness....
(Psalm 130:3-4a)*

If we're honest most of us will admit that we've gotten ourselves into a pickle or two by being less-than-honest, less-than-faithful, less-than-kind, less-than-upright, less-than-loving, less-than-holy, less-than-commandment-abiding. When the outcome is awful, even downright painful for us (and maybe for others), someone might say to us (or we might say to ourselves): "You made your bed, sleep in it. You made your lousy choice, now live with the consequences." But sometimes, by the grace of God, after we've hit bottom **hard** and been left reeling with a spiritual concussion, **we cry out** for divine help we don't deserve but need desperately.

This is what the Bible scholar Walter Brueggemann says about the cry that launches Psalm 130 (a cry that sometimes escapes our lips and our soul):

[It] is the miserable cry of a nobody from nowhere. [And yet....] The cry penetrates the veil of heaven. It is heard and received. The gospel affirms that the cries from the depth are the voices to which Yahweh is particularly attuned.¹

God hears. God cares. God acts. Our cry from the depths mysteriously moves our God.

...[N]o place or circumstance is beyond the reach of God's forgiving, loving, redeeming presence and power.²

Too many people feel that they don't have a right to call out when they're in "need of a favor" from God if they haven't been in frequent "radio contact" with heaven when things were good. They say, "I'd be a hypocrite to reach out now that I need something." **Wrong.**

Think about it. Jesus tells us that our God is like a father who scans the horizon every day for his no-account son who is, regardless, still his beloved child. The father never tires of watching and waiting for the "prodigal child" to return. Sure, the one who'd cashed in his inheritance and blown it all, coming home half-starved and fully humiliated, doesn't deserve a homecoming party. But that's what he gets. Our God hears every miserable cry from every nobody from nowhere. Our cry, however dejected, pathetic, expressing pain we brought on ourselves, that cry "penetrates the veil of heaven. It is heard and received."

Never as quick as we hope, though, right? The psalmist is doing some self-talk when he composes these verses of his song:

*I wait for you, O LORD; my soul waits;
in your word is my hope.
My soul waits for the Lord more than those who keep watch for the morning,
more than those who keep watch for the morning.*

Waiting in hope for God to answer **any** kind of prayer is an act of faith. St. Paul wrote, "All things work together for God for those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose." (Romans 8:28) That belief fortifies our trust that no matter how dismal our current circumstance (whether we invited it or not), God has something better planned. And that divine "something better" will be revealed – eventually. Salvation will come in God's time, **not** according to our preferred time table. Martin Luther wrote, "I wait for God to help me **when it pleases Him.**"³

Luther referred to us as “waiters” – people of faith who wait upon God’s good time. God is **not** the waiter, expected to serve up what we want, when we want it!

Forgiveness comes, salvation comes, in God’s time. Some folks might take this to mean that sin isn’t a worry if forgiveness is offered so freely. But they’d be wrong. St. Paul reminds us that we have been bought with a price, so we owe everything to the One who gave His all for our redemption. He Himself cried out from the cross, out of the depths of His spiritual pain and human experience of aloneness, quoting Psalm 22, “My God, my God, why have You abandoned Me?” He who cried out from the depths on Calvary, who descended even further to harrow Hell, hears the cries of us nobodies from nowhere. **Our** cry also penetrates the veil of heaven, which was rent at His baptism, like the Holy of Holies which tore from top to bottom when He breathed His last in love and obedience.

Never doubt: our cries **are** heard and received. Our sins are forgiven. Our pain will be lifted. Our souls will be healed. Let us live and wait and hope accordingly. Amen

¹Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), pp. 104-105.

²*New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), p. 1207.

³Jaroslav Pelikan, ed. *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 14, Selected Psalms III (St. Louis, Concordia, 1958), p. 192.

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