

***A Walk Through the Psalms: God Forgives***  
***Leviticus 6:1-7; Psalm 130; Matthew 12:31-32; Colossians 1:11-13***  
***Salem United Methodist Church; July 1, 2018***  
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This sermon based on Psalm 130 concludes our Walk Through the Psalms series. The eight verses of this Psalm impacted the lives of both Martin Luther and John Wesley. For Luther, Psalm 130 spoke to his soul as he struggled and faced the challenges of breaking away from the Catholic Church. For Wesley, hearing a choir sing this Psalm, *Dei Profundus*, at St. Paul's Cathedral the afternoon of May 24, 1738 prepared his soul to receive forgiveness and salvation as his heart was "strangely warmed" when he heard the reading of Luther's Commentary on Romans later in the evening. These eight ancient verses still speak to our human condition in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and speak to whom God still is.

The opening words to this Psalm are haunting. "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!" These words scream pain and suffering. These words are more than singing the blues in a minor key, slow and low. These are words of desperation. The one who shouts these words has hit rock bottom and cries out to God knowing that only God can hear and help. Have you ever been here? Have you ever felt like there was no way out of a mess, or felt so low that you could not begin to find a way to get up? This Psalmist has. With these words, we sense anger, fear, anxiety, frustration, desperation, disorder, and hopelessness. Have you ever been here? With these words there is sense of a journey through darkness or of being stuck in a pit. "Help me, God, the bottom has fallen out of my life! Help me! Are you listening? Hear me out!" Have you ever been here? If you have, you are not alone. The Psalmist has, too, and offers us this model to express our raw emotions to God.

We don't know the circumstances that led up to the Psalmist crying out to God, but verse 3 gives us a hint. The Psalmist realizes that his own actions and behaviors have put him in this place of feeling at his lowest. He realizes that he has created his own mess. He is at fault. No one else. We do not need to know what his iniquities or his sins are. What we do need to know is that he is admitting to them. Admitting one's faults, what one has done wrong, what role one has played in a situation, how one has wronged another, or sinned against another is difficult. This takes spiritual maturity to face how one's actions have impacted another or a particular situation.

One of the things I am noticing about our world is that we are really good at pointing fingers at each other. We have become experts at articulating what others have done wrong and we do not even begin to consider what role we may have played in the mess we are in. We readily point out that, "It's your fault, not mine," or "It's their fault and not ours."

Relationships dissolve because neither party will admit to having wronged the other. And our nation is divided because neither side will admit to how they have contributed to the problem. Each side points the finger at the other side and blames them for our mess. We keep score of each other's faults, sins, iniquities. Keeping score of each other's faults breaks down relationships and divides. But the Psalmist tells us God doesn't keep score of our sins. God seeks ways to rebuild the relationship with humanity. We sin. God forgives. God is open to being in a vulnerable relationship with a sinful humanity. Think of it this way. When someone has harmed you repeatedly, are you willing to forgive them? Usually we can recount every single thing someone have done to hurt us. We think forgiving the one who harms us makes us vulnerable to being hurt again. But not for God, God is resilient to our sins. God forgives with the hope of rebuilding the relationship so it can become even stronger. The Psalmist realizes this is the power of God and the reason we are to humble ourselves to worship a God that is so great.

In four short verses, there is a cry for help from the depths of the soul. There is an admission of one's own actions and trusting in God to forgive. There is waiting for forgiveness to come. Waiting for God to turn things around. Waiting in the darkness of the night for the morning sun to rise. If you have ever been awake in the middle of the night worrying over a situation or confronting one's own actions in a situation, you know the desperation in the voice of the Psalmist for the morning light to break through the darkness. Nights can be long and lonely. Anyone who has worked a night shift yearns to see the fresh, morning shift to come and relieve them. The morning sun becomes a relief, a hope of a new day, a fresh start. The burdens of the night seem less in the light of day. So the Psalmist waits and waits and waits for the hope that comes when the light breaks into the darkness. Then the Psalm changes from speaking to God, to speaking to the nation. Up until this point it seems that this Psalm is a plea from an individual, but now it becomes a warning for the nation, Israel. It is as though the Psalmist is saying, "See what God has done for me? God can do this for all of us collectively. God is great. God forgives. God redeems our sins or buys our nation back. God loves us forever.

This Psalm is considered one of fifteen Psalms of Ascent or Steps. It would have been recited by the Jews as they climbed the steps of or made their ascent to the Temple for holy day celebrations. This Psalm was used as a confession of both an individual's sins and national sins so all could be purified or have a clean start. Today Jews recite this Psalm during Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, when they confess and seek forgiveness for their sins. This Psalm of Ascent also lays out the steps one can take or ascend to as we seek forgiveness from God. First, admit one is lost and cry out to God. Second, recognize one's own faults or sins, not someone else's. Third, wait for and hope in the forgiveness of God. It will come. Fourth, recognize that the individual is just a small part of a larger picture, a community, a nation.

Then call all of us to admit to our sins; seek forgiveness from God and each other. God's forgiveness and love is the real power. Human seats of power can't hold a candle to God's power.

As followers of Jesus, we recognize the power of God's forgiveness and love. For us the cross becomes the symbol of the forgiveness of our sins and God's great love for us. We reenact Psalm 130 in our Communion liturgy. We begin in the pit where we are invited to identify and confess our sins so we can live in peace with one another, and not continue living in conflict. Second, we are invited to confess our sins both corporately as a church and individually in the silence of our hearts. Next, we wait to receive the hope of forgiveness. Then, as forgiven people, we reconcile with each other by sharing the peace that comes from receiving the forgiveness given to us by Christ. Next we give thanks for the power of God's forgiveness and love offered to us through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Again, we wait to receive the elements of bread and juice, what John Wesley called the outward sign of an inward grace. We can outwardly see, hear, touch, smell, and taste this outward sign, the elements that represent the inward grace of our death to sin and our resurrection to new life offered to us through the forgiveness of our sins. Our Communion liturgy takes us from crying from the depths of our souls as we wait to receive forgiveness and new life in Christ.

Both our Communion liturgy and Psalm 130 shows us that there is no place, no circumstance, no set-back, no sin that is beyond the reach of God's forgiving, loving, redeeming power. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection becomes the tangible presence of God's forgiving, loving, redeeming power in our midst. I invite you to reread Psalm 130 and pause after each verse so these words can settle into the depths of our souls as we admit our sins, seek forgiveness, wait for the renewal of the dawn of the new day and call our nation to repentance.

**Resources:** "Lament and Praise" from *The Living Pulpit; Journey Through the Psalms* by Denise Hopkins; *New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. IV*.