

"On Waiting and Hoping"

April 4, 2022

Selah: Life in a Minor Key series

It is so good to be back! I'm Pastor Kim Bos, I'm the campus minister and executive director of the Wesley House at Ferris State University and I am so glad to be with you this morning! I love guest preaching anywhere, but Dorothy was really on to something when she said there's no place like home, so I am not just glad to be here, I'm glad to be here with you.

We are in the fifth Sunday of Lent, this season where we journey with Christ toward the cross, where we examine our hearts and lives. And you all are in week five of a series called Selah- a series that focuses on and explores the Psalms.

Can I be really candid with you for a moment? I had to go back and check my records, but in my three years of seminary education, four years of family ministry, and three years at Wesley and guest preaching all around the state - this is my first time preaching a sermon where the base text, the text that will inform and call forth the message, was a Psalm. Sure, I've used Psalms for prayers, they lend themselves beautifully to communal and responsive readings. I have written calls to worship and benedictions that were rooted in specific Psalms, but never a whole sermon. And as I prepared for this Sunday, I wasn't really sure how to do it.

I joked with one of my students during office hours this week that it felt like if the Gospel is the meat of the meal, I was trying to make a whole meal out of the sauce - and without missing a beat, she said "that's called soup"

And she was right. When we read the Psalms, we have to approach them differently; they're a different genre. We can't read them like we read the gospel narratives, or the Pauline epistles, or even the books of history or law. Psalms are poetry, and like poetry, sometimes they get dismissed or glossed over.

It will surprise you not at all to know that I took not one, but two creative writing classes when I was in High School, partially because I loved the woman who taught them. Mrs. K was and is everything we want our English teachers to be, feisty and funny, passionate and compassionate, and whether you had her for 10th grade English or a creative writing unit, she always started her poetry unit the same way.

Her class would read a piece together, and then she would ask students to go around and say one word that described it. Inevitably, some poor soul put on the spot would say it was "nice." And she would turn on them, and drop her practiced

speech about how poetry is not nice! It's powerful, it's alluring, is soul-crushing, it's majestic, it is maddening, pulse-quickening, mind-boggling, heart-healing, spirit mending... This woman loved poetry... She would say to read a poem for all it's worth is to do the careful work of uncovering what is hidden, seeing the world through someone else, and coming to know them as you know yourself. If the poem was just "Nice" she'd say, it was because we hadn't looked close enough.

Sometimes, we, as Christians, get to the Psalms and go "nice," so today, I want to invite us to look closely and carefully at all that the writer of this Psalm has hidden for us right here in plain sight.

Let's dig in. The writer opens this Psalm by setting the scene, saying, "Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord;" What does your mind picture when you picture "the depths"? What image does your mind conjure? Maybe a deep dark hole? A pit? The part of the Ocean that is so deep that no sunlight makes it down there and the only fish that live there are either see-through or generating their own light to lure prey? Is that where the Psalmist is crying out from?

"The depths" was such an interesting concept that I pulled out some reference books this week. When this passage appears in Latin, the expression they use is "de profundis" a term that means "internal or external turmoil." Ohhh, that's really different. When taken back to its original Hebrew, "the depths" is translated as "Ma oh-mek-eem" a phrase that has two translations! It both means deep water (see our ocean picture wasn't so far off) and also chaotic forces of destruction, devastation, and death - whoops that one is really different. Your poet is doing this beautiful and powerful thing- they are using this tied-together metaphor of deep and turbulent water to bring us the feelings of chaos and destruction.

And the early readers would have recognized it. They would have remembered that Pharaoh's army in the exodus story was swallowed up by Ma oh-mek-eem. That destruction, devastation, and death- along with the waters of the Red Sea swept them away. If they were paying close attention, they might also remember the prophet Isaiah who in chapter 51 ask God, "Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made a road through the depths through ma oh-mek-eem so that the redeemed might cross over?" Was Isaiah saying that God would make a way through water, or make a path through the forces of death and destruction? YES. The answer is yes.

And this illustration of chaos and water, still resonates with us. Those of us who live on this side of the state love our lake, and most of us have a memory of

stepping into it on a high squall day, where the waves are high and thrashing, and even in shallow water we can feel the current trying to pull us out. Anyone who has ever been caught in a wave that grabbed them at just the wrong moment knows the feeling of being held underwater and rolled, knees and elbows thrashing, trying to find the ground or the surface, the scary moment when up is down and down is up, and we're holding our breath and fighting a force that feels so much bigger than ourselves.

And most of can think of a time when we felt like our lives were in deep water, when currents of worry or grief lapped around our knees threatening to pull us under, when illness, loss, betrayal or tragedy grabbed us and thrashed us- so that we were holding our breath and trying to find our feet- not sure if this would be the one that held us under for good.

We long for calm, shallow water, for days spend lounging, splashing, and playing through our lives- but this is not where the Psalmist cries out from, it isn't where we cry out from either.

What should we do when we are caught in the riptides of this world, after we have cried out to God? Wait and hope.

How many of you would say that you're good at waiting for things that you want? No, not many, glad to see I'm not alone. Waiting is the worst! Peek in at any doctor's office, long line at the bank, or crowded restaurant and you will quickly notice that we, humanity, have a hard time waiting. We tap, we fidget, we scroll and scroll and scroll, we sigh, we huff, sometimes we even get a little snippy- doing nothing is harder than it seems. Patience is hard to cultivate, in times of pain or trouble, even more so. We want relief. We want things fixed, settled, or at least changing and we want it now. But we are called to wait upon the Lord.

There are three factors that can change how we wait for God to move.

- 1. Our certainty that God will.**

We don't wait for things that we don't expect to happen.

If you know that your dentist has gone home for the day, you don't continue reading old magazines, you leave too.

I'm not waiting around to win the Powerball, because while it'd be nice, I just don't think it's going to happen. Part of waiting well is faith that the thing we are waiting for is coming.

And the Psalmist is willing to wait because they are assured of the

redemptive and transformative the nature of God.

We must wait with the same certainty. When we cry out to God, for deliverance, for rescue, for restoration we must then remind ourselves who God is. Who God has always been. We spend our waiting time reminding ourselves of all the times God has saved God's people, we tell stories and testimonies of how God has worked in our lives so that we may encourage and reassure each other. Our waiting on God means that we expect God will act. We do not know when, we do not know how, but we boldly proclaim that God will deliver us and we will wait.

2. Our waiting upon the Lord is shaped by understanding that redemption does not depend on us.

Waiting demands that we give up control. Waiting asks us to acknowledge that what happens and when it happens does not depend on us. Getting sassy with the hostess may get us removed from the restaurant, but it will not get us served any sooner. Asking relentless questions of the desk receptionist and threatening to leave will not get our driver's license renewed. And no amount of raging against the creator of the universe, doing good works, or bargaining will bring God's healing and deliverance any sooner. We can't rush God. So instead, we must do the hard work of submitting to and trusting God's timing.

3. Our waiting is shaped by our focus

The Psalmist tells us that they wait, and we by extension, should wait, for God like the watchmen waits for morning. Says it twice to give it emphasis. But that might be a reference that is lost on us as modern readers.

The early readers of this text would have lived in cities, surrounded on all sides by high walls because they were always under threat of being attacked by invading armies. One need not be a top tier military strategist, only have played an intense game of capture the flag to know that it is advantageous to attack in the dark, when your enemy cannot see you and might even be asleep and so wise leaders of these cities posted night watchmen on the walls. These patrolmen watched for movement, for threats, but more than anything - they waited for the sun to peek over the horizon because it would mean that the threat had passed. No one attacks in the light of day, so the morning brings with it safety, security. It brings the hope of the new day. A watchman waits for the morning as if their life depends on it- because sometimes it does.

We still have jobs that spend their nights, waiting and watching for morning. While the rest of us slumber peacefully - doctors, nurses, EMTs, Police officers, security guards, firefighters, and countless other unseen helpers are working through the night, prepared to come to the rescue, to respond to threat... and waiting for morning.

One of our Mississippi friends got her first job after nursing school working the third shift of the small local hospital. When I had lunch with her a few weeks in, she said, "I like it because it's a slower pace, and I really get to know the people I work with. But we all spend a lot of time with our eyes on the clock. Because overnight, there's only six of us on the floor, the lab is closed, most of the techs have gone home, if there is an emergency all six of us will be involved in keeping those patients alive, we can't even really fix them, we're just trying to keep them stable enough that a doctor can get the page and come. We're just trying to help them make it through until first shift comes in. Until the specialists, technicians, and support crew can get to them. We're just six people trying to keep everyone alive until the sun comes up"

Chelsey would have known how those watchmen waited, with urgency, with focus, with hope. Because that's what hope is, isn't it? It's the [fervent](#) desire and confident expectation. And this is how we are meant to wait for God's deliverance and transformation of us and this world- longing for it and sure that it is coming!

And this is good news. This is the gospel. Our hope is not in us. It is not our job to earn our own salvation, to blot out our own sins. Christ has done it. We need not deliver the world by our own relentless, flawless, herculean efforts. God will deliver it. It isn't our responsibility to heal this world's brokenness. The great healer is close at hand, and can, and will do the healing. We put our hope in this.

This does not mean that we are not workers of the kingdom, this does not give us permission to do whatever we want, whenever we want, to use and abuse each other and the planet as we see fit.

Instead, it means that even in when we are our deepest dark, when we have been battered and bruised, when we are faced with destruction, death, and desolation, when the world has us so that we don't know which way is up or how any of this can be redeemed, we can cry out to God and God will hear us. We must wait- desperately, attentively, actively wait- and place our hope not in our worthiness, our blamelessness, or our abilities, but in who God is and who God has always been. We must wait and hope because our God is not far off, is with us, and

is for us, and there is nothing we can do, or that this world can do to us, that would make our lives so broken, so wretched, so unlucky, so fallen, so desolate, that God cannot heal, mend, lift, connect, bless, transform, and redeem them. We may be broken. This world may be broken. But God is with us, and morning is coming. Wait and hope in God along.

Amen.