

PENTECOST 13 - Psalm 40:1-10 - Wait for the Lord

I waited and waited for the Lord. Yeah, right! King David is famous for many things; waiting is not one of them! This Psalm tells a story of a young David out in the wilderness with his troop of men, hiding from a crazed king, exploring the land. Suddenly David stumbles into a swamp sinking into mire stuck in the mud alone. He cries out: Help me! Anyone?! Lord!!? Help!

Then comes the waiting, trying not to struggle, slime rising up his legs, panic rising in his blood. If you fight the mud it claims you. You must fight the fear and keep still. You have to wait. All you can do is cry for help and wait.

And help comes. Friends come running. Stop! careful! Extracting a man from mud requires thought and planning, team work and tools, lest another man is lost. Slowly, with strength and gentleness, David is pulled up and out. Feet connect with rock. He has never been so grateful for solid ground.

He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out of the mud and the mire. He set my feet on solid ground, and steadied me as I walked along. He has given me a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God.

Oh, the joys of those who trust God. David remembered that bog for his entire life. When enemies encircled, when stress threatened to overwhelm, he remembered his cry for help. He remembered the reality of help. He remembered the bursting joy.

Oh Lord my God, you have done many miracles for us, Your plans for us are too numerous to list. If I tried to recite all your wonderful deeds, I

would never come to the end of it.

Two weeks ago we looked at a psalm of lament, a cry for help in the middle of a crisis, described as sinking in mud and mire and drowning, emotions one would feel while facing an overwhelming crisis. Then last week we read a psalm of trust. Again there's a crisis at hand, but this time there is also calm.

This is not a first crisis, and God is trusted to bring one through as God has done in past crises. Now in today's psalm, there is a crisis, the crisis is faced with calm. Once again God comes through, and David responds with a song of thanks to the God who saved him.

Psalm 40 is typical of the song of thanks because it: describes the time of crisis and how the psalmist asked God for help; it praises God; it describes the help that God gave. In this individual psalm of thanksgiving and praise, the psalm becomes a model for thanksgiving. In his prayer, the psalmist takes us beyond the usual pattern of laments, deeper into the nature of thanksgiving and its connection to petition and plea.

These psalms of praise and thanksgiving speak for those who have been brought through a deep crisis. As such, they know that faith that speaks the truth can never pretend that all will always be well, and that all is as it should be. And yet, they have experienced new life and grace, so they know that despair is not all powerful, and evil does not have the last word.

What delights God is to have his servant say *'Here, I have come!'* It is the servant's delight to do God's will and to hold God's teachings deep inside. This does not mean that the sacrificial system is no longer

necessary, but that the internal orientation of the one who comes near to God is paramount. He stands before God completely vulnerable. Giving all of one's life to God is the essential point of the psalm, the delight of the one who is blessed is to do God's will and have God's teaching in his heart.

The outworking of the one who delights to do God's will finds expression in the proclamation of good news to the great assembly. What is in the psalmist's heart cannot be kept there, so he now proclaims God's 'steadfast love', faithfulness, salvation, and righteousness. The mention of the great assembly at the start and end of these verses emphasizes that thanksgiving can only be true thanksgiving, if it invites others into its experience. The psalm also calls for testimony: *"I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation."* When we receive God's aid, the "thank you note" that God craves is that we tell others where they, too, can find God.

"I waited and waited for the Lord!" These words point to one of the foundational blocks of faith. There is an old expression that says, *"All good things come to those who wait."* In Galatians, waiting or patience makes Paul's top-nine list of qualities that represent the "fruit of the Spirit." *"...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."*

Fruit of the Spirit represents the qualities that develop in our lives as the Spirit of God grows the character of Christ within us. It is clear that faith brings a sense of love and joy to our living and without faith it would be hard to imagine having a real sense of peace. Then comes that fourth item on Paul's list - patience.

A survey once asked how people thought they were doing with these nine "fruits" of the Spirit. They were asked to rank the qualities from one to nine in terms of easiest to most difficult to live out. And the most difficult? A large number of people admitted that they are "patience challenged." How do you feel in a long line at the grocery store when the cash register tape runs out; or standing in line at the bank behind someone who is depositing his business receipts; or waiting on hold during a service call or call to a government department or doctor's office?

All these little "inconveniences" test us. Patience or waiting is not our number one strength. And yet, there it is, right smack, dab at the outset of our reading: *"I waited and waited for the Lord!"* If this injunction to have patience were an isolated one it would be different. But the issue of waiting on God is repeated over and over again throughout Scripture.

From last week's psalm we heard: *"Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!"* and another psalm, *"Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him;"* and from Lamentations: *"The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him."*

And here is the secret. It is not simple *waiting* that we are about, but rather it is *"waiting upon the Lord"* that builds us up spiritually and gives us a sense of peace. The Bible is not telling us to simply, *"Grin and bear it"*, while we wait on hold or, *"Keep a stiff upper lip"*, until it is your turn at the cash register in the grocery store, or *"Hang in there"*, as you wait for the results of a medical test.

Waiting, as we experience it in our every day life, is an exercise in trying

to escape stress. Patience in stressful times is a struggle of our human nature. Perhaps the morning and evening "rush" in major metropolitan areas is the epitome of *"waiting"* and the stress of contemporary living.

But all of this is not *"waiting upon the Lord."* It is just waiting. Plain old tranquillity-busting, peace-denying, toxic waiting. Waiting on the Lord is a whole other thing. There may be times when the stress and trials of life are weighing heavily on our minds and hearts and there are two ways to go. We can simply *"wait it out"* or we can *"wait on the Lord."*

Waiting on the Lord is to allow faith to engage our lives at the point of difficulty and rest in a gentle trust that we are cared for and that God will bring to pass every divine purpose for our lives. *"Waiting and waiting for the Lord"* is not simply waiting. It is, *"Waiting and winning!"* Consider the long waiting and winning for for the ELCIC to allow same sex marriages or the long waiting and winning as the United States finally allowed same sex marriages in all fifty states - despite the fact that one pastor promised to set himself on fire if the legislation passed.

The Psalmist notes that there are three specific "winning" outcomes when he waits patiently for the Lord: *"I waited and waited for the Lord: He heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit. He put a new song in my mouth."* There are some great spiritual truths in these few lines.

First, God is listening! One of the hallmarks of our generation is that hardly anyone is listening anymore. It isn't that there is nothing to hear – there is so much noise surrounding us, that we talk about "noise pollution." Have you ever noticed that people become louder when they think no one is listening? It happens a lot in our personal relationships. Have you ever heard someone actually shout, ***"You're not listening to***

me!"

One of the most important things we can do to build authentic Christian Community is to take time to listen to each other. Listening attentively to another person is a gift to that person. We could dramatically lower the need for therapeutic intervention in people's lives if we would increase the amount of time we carefully listen to each other.

When people don't listen, we can pretty much assume they don't care. In their book on Christian Caring, Robert Wicks and Thomas Rodgerson write: *"We cannot care without listening. If we do not listen, we do not care."* Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated that the first service we owe to others in fellowship is to listen to them. If we fail to listen, there are spiritual consequences because, as he says: *'he who can no longer listen to his brother will soon be no longer listening to God either.'*

The good news is that God is listening to us. Whether we are enjoying good times or languishing in tough times, the affirmation of the scripture is that God is paying attention to the details of our living and listening to our laughter and our cries.

Isn't that amazing? Even though we may not be able to get mere mortals around us to listen, we have the ear of the God of the universe. **That** is incentive to patiently wait for God!

Secondly, God is guiding us! God does more than listen. When we line our lives up with God by patiently waiting for and talking with the God who listens to us, we can count on God's guidance. Not only does the Psalmist declare that God is listening - but God also acts on his behalf. *"He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out of the mud and the mire. He*

set my feet on solid ground and steadied me as I walked along."

Living in relationship with God and talking with God in solid confidence that God hears, will insure that our steps are "secure." We gain clarity and direction in living. We are able to grow in secure assurance while waiting and waiting on the Lord.

And thirdly, God is renewing! Life is more precious than we have ever dreamed of, richer than we have dared to imagine, and greater than we could ever have envisioned. Life is an amazing, sacred gift of God and God alone knows how great that gift can be. The Psalmist points us to a wonderful key for living: *"Waiting is winning."* He waits patiently for God who is listening to his cries. The One who knows best finally lifts the Psalmist from his desolation and sets his feet in a good place where his steps are secure. And then: *"He put a new song in my mouth!"*

Waiting patiently for the Lord is an active step of faith. It is not a lazy waiting or resigned acceptance of an unknown fate. For the person of faith, waiting patiently for the Lord is trusting that God will hear and act on our behalf. We do not need to know **when** God will act, or **how** God will act. We place our absolute trust that the One who knows us best will most certainly bring us to a place in our lives where the "new song" will also be placed in our hearts and brought to our lips.

Waiting and waiting for the Lord becomes a lifestyle, not a quick fix in times of trial. We set God before us from our rising up until our laying down. We are renewed day by day and grow steadily in our appreciation for the great gift that life really is. As we live with the eyes of faith as well as physical sight, day by day we understand more fully that God renews us as we wait and wait.

In our Gospel, we read about the ten lepers who had been suffering their entire life, thrown out of their communities. They had been waiting and waiting on God. Jesus responds to their suffering by curing all ten of them. But, only one responds with thanksgiving. That is the problem with many of us, with our society. We approach God. God listens. God responds. We are overjoyed. Then we forget to thank God. We forget to tell others about God and what he has done for us.

The songs of thanksgiving are known as reorientation psalms because they are the songs of praise that are sung by those who have walked the darkest valleys, stood in the midst of the shaking mountains, experienced life when the bottom drops out. Life will never be the same. But, God met these sufferers in the depths of their sufferings. And they have a simple message: God found me. Praise the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord.

Amen.

PRAYERS FOR AUGUST 27, 2023

Gracious and loving God, we come to you with hearts that need to be opened to your word and your love. There is so much around us that tears at us and causes us to tremble. Keep us to ever be mindful of your presence and the hope that you have given us in your Son Jesus Christ.

Guide us, we pray, as your church, struggling to spread the good news. Keep us focused on the mission and ministry to which you have called us. We know, Lord, that there will often be bumps and holes and other obstacles along the way. Save us from dwelling on them and keep us secure and focused on the goals you have placed before us. Lead us forward trusting that you are ahead preparing the way.

We lift before you the millions of hungry people in the Democratic Republic of Congo; those women and girls in all parts of the world whose lives are marred by domestic violence; those who are treated as property, trafficked, and enslaved.

We pray for the feeding of the hungry, the clothing of the destitute, the housing of the homeless, the reformation of prisoners, and the rehabilitation of those who are living addicted to drugs and other substances. Bless every frontline service agency, church or government, which is dedicated to the care of our disadvantaged sisters and brothers.

We pray for the provision of systems of justice that they are truly just and fair. Whether they are within our homeland, in other nations, or international courts of justice, may those who are brought to court find equality and the provision of their rights before the law. Bless with insight and integrity each barrister and judge, and work in the mind and soul of every juror, to ensure that the innocent may be exonerated and the hearts of those sentenced turned towards repentance, restorative justice, and regeneration.

We pray for the church, Rt. Rev. Chris Harper, Bishop, and the clergy and people of the Diocese of Saskatoon; Bishop Kathy Martin, the people and rostered ministers, deacons and lay leaders of the BC

Synod; The World Council of Churches Assembly; our sister congregation San Juan Camino d'Esperanza in Peru, and for all Christian denominations large or small, that we may love one another and our neighbours, in practice as well as in prayer. Bless all joint initiatives in worship, fellowship and service to the community. May the world know that there is a grace at work in us.

We pray for all your world, always, sadly, at odds with one another. Guide our leaders and those of other nations that this world might truly be as you created it to be—a world of peace, hope and love, one of wholeness and well-being for all, one in which your great vision of shalom is experienced. Heal us from our warring ways in Ukraine, Sudan, and so many other places and as we hear of hundreds of migrants being killed by border guards in Saudi Arabia.

Loving God, we pray for all those affected by wildfires; for evacuees, for those left behind, for those on alerts, for firefighters, for families and friends who watch and worry. We pray for the safety of property, and for forest life. We give thanks for the countless small and large acts of hospitality, kindnesses, and neighborly acts of charity that have knit together strangers to care for one another. O God, whose love encircles us, sustain those who respond when wildfires roar, keep them safe from harm and hold them in your sheltering embrace so that they may complete these burdensome tasks, return home to their families, and keep the lives and homes of all they protect safe from harm. In the upcoming days and weeks give enduring hope and strength to the many who face the huge task of rebuilding their lives and their communities. May all know the assurance of your provision and your presence with them.

Loving God, we pray also for those affected by the explosion and fire in Prince George earlier this week. We pray for those injured, and for those whose homes and businesses were impacted. Surround them and the wider community with support and ongoing care as they grapple with the longer-term impact.

Hear our prayers for all who need your tender touch of healing in their lives—those we name before you each day, and those who are known only to you in the depths of our hearts. Be with those who

mourn. May we all remember the love and grace that your faithful people have brought to our world.

We pray for the effective, compassionate care of all who suffer from sicknesses of any sort; physical, mental, emotional or spiritual, including ailing members of this congregation. Bless all who work in clinics and hospitals and long-term care facilities: surgeons, physiotherapists, nurses, physicians, oncologists, psychiatrists, social workers dieticians, dentists, pharmacists, housekeeping staff, and the staff and volunteers of hospices caring for the dying.

Open our eyes that we might see your presence. Open our ears, that we might hear and respond to your call. Open our hearts, that we might love others as you have loved us. Open our hands, that we might serve as Jesus instructed us to serve. Merciful and Gracious God, may we live in the joy of your steadfast love, today, and always.

Amen.