

“Hope and Change”

Psalm 130

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This morning our attention is drawn to one of the most heartfelt Psalms in the Bible. The opening words inform the reader this was written by someone in distress who was dealing with feelings of despair.

“Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. O Lord, hear my voice.” (Psalm 130:1)

This style of writing is referred to as a lament, the most passionate expression of guilt, grief or sorrow. Laments show up not only in the Psalms but also in the writings of the prophets who voiced the feelings of the homesick Hebrew children who lived in exile in Babylon after the fall of Jerusalem.

If you are looking for the modern version of laments, listen carefully to the texts of many country songs or ballads. There you will find no shortage of distress and despair, as well as hope for a better way forward.

I am not surprised laments were favored by the 16th century German priest and professor, Martin Luther. His attempts to influence and reform the church met with great resistance, leading to feelings similar to those voiced by the Psalmist and the prophets who penned laments.

Our text is not just a lament; it is also an ascent Psalm. It was one of the Psalms the people sang as they ascended the hill in Jerusalem upon which the Temple was built.

Worshippers would sing as they walked in order to prepare their hearts for worship and focus their attention upon God. The purpose of Psalm 130 was to remind congregants of their sinfulness and need for forgiveness.

No one was perfect. Their sins may not have been the same, but all of them needed to enter the Temple humble and repentant.

I am partial to laments because they give us great insight into the ways of mankind and the character of God. In laments, you find the good, the bad and the ugly which reside in each of us. You also discover the character of God, in particular, the mercy of God.

Let's look at Psalm 130 to see what it teaches us about what it means to be human and what it means to be God.

What does Psalm 130 teach us about ourselves? At times, life is bigger than we are and often we need help...lots of help.

Who first voiced the words we read in Psalm 130? Most scholars attribute them to David, the greatest king of Israel.

What do we know about David when he uttered these words? He was at a low point in his life, perhaps the lowest point.

“Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.”

Many believe these words reflect David’s broken heart and spirit. This mighty man who had risen to the highest level of power and authority had fallen into an abyss deeper than he had ever been. No daylight could penetrate the darkness surrounding him.

In all likelihood, this Psalm was crafted as David was dealing with the aftermath of his affair with Bathsheba and the death of her husband that he ordered to cover up his deception. David actually dug this hole and then tumbled in it due to his selfishness and pride. The forces which led to his downfall and destruction were of his own making.

“Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.”

People cry out to God for many reasons, and I am aware it is not always their fault. Sometimes the hole we find ourselves in is the result of failing health, grief over the loss of a loved one, worry over mounting bills, conflict in a relationship, anxiety over grades or concern for a family member struggling with an addiction.

There is any number of things which can overwhelm us and send us into the pit of despair. At times, life is tough and terrible.

King David, however, was not a victim. No one pushed him into this hole. He tripped in all by himself by being selfish, undisciplined, arrogant and stubborn.

It dug its own grave, and it created a lot of attention in the lengthy process. In 1986, the world’s largest coal moving shovel began digging a hole from which it would never climb out.

This shovel, affectionately called Big Hog by the men who worked on it, had been in operation twenty-three years. It uncovered nearly eighty million tons of coal for the Tennessee Valley Authority’s steam plant near Drakesboro, Kentucky.

While coal would continue to be mined using underground tunnels, surface mining in Mughlenberg County would cease due to the unavailability of large tracts of land. Peabody Coal Company officials decided the most cost efficient way to retire Big Hog was to let it dig its own grave and cover it up.

This massive earth moving machine cost seven million dollars to build in the early ‘60’s and was transported to Mughlenberg County on three hundred railroad cars. It had over 5,000

parts and took a year to assemble. When it was completed, Big Hog was twenty-two stories high with a 250' foot boom.

The bucket could pick up 115 cubic yards of dirt and was large enough to hold two pickup trucks parked end to end. Many, especially in the mining industry, considered it the Eighth Wonder of the World.

Sometimes people dig their own graves, too. Like David, we can be our own worst enemy.

It is a horrible feeling to know you have dug your own grave. This level of despair is unbearable when reality finally sinks in, isn't it?

You may be feeling this kind of pain and hopelessness today. I am sorry if you are, but I have some good news for you.

This lament not only gives us insight into what it means to be human, but it also reveals the loving character of God.

Why did David cry out to God? The truth was a bitter pill to swallow.

When the prophet, Nathan, had an intervention and confronted David with his sins and crimes, David plummeted to the lowest place he had ever been. At that moment, he was beyond anyone's reach but God's.

In his heart, David believed God would hear and respond to his earnest plea for help, and he was right. The same God who helped his ancestors in their times of despair would come to his aid, too.

I deeply appreciate what this Psalm teaches us about God. It reveals a God who loves us at our worst as well as our best, a God who will not abandon us when others have taken flight, a God who will give us another chance, and another, and another.

This lament portrays a God whose unfailing love will help us take responsibility for our actions, make amends for our mistakes, change the way we think and behave and repair our relationships.

This Psalm presents a God who will create in us a new heart, work to bring about good from bad, give us back our future and light the way to a new and better life.

No wonder David reached out to God and eagerly waited for God to come like a night watchman longs for the first rays of daylight. David believed in a God who specialized in helping people climb out of the depths of despair, even if they dug their own grave. This was why he begged all the citizens of Israel to follow his lead.

Will you let David's God help you this morning? Will you cry out to God for mercy as David did? Will you show the world what redemption looks like?

I pray you will. I firmly believe faith and forgiveness can lead to hope and change.

On the other hand, who do you know that feels like David did when he voiced this lament? What could you do to reach out to them?

I know it is not easy to love the unlovely and unlovable, but haven't we all needed someone to love us at our worst? Is it time to follow God's example and help someone whose future depends upon us being the presence of God in their life this week?

Ask God to help you. I am confident He will.