

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14
 Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20
 Galatians 5:1,13-25
 Luke 9:51-62

SERMON

In the mountain home where my parents once lived, I would sit out on the deck in the late afternoon, the pine trees lit up with golden sunlight, and I would hear the sound of someone in the distance chopping wood. The sound of an axe slicing through timber gave off a thumping resonance that echoed through the forest. That sound is still a favorite of mine. It reassures me that I am not alone.

Across the street, on breezy days, I hear the gentle tinkling sound of a tiny glass mobile that moves with the wind. It belongs to my windowed neighbor. It once belonged to his wife. But she is gone now. I think of her when I hear it softly singing. She is not forgotten.

I stand with my phone to my ear, hearing the phone ringing, waiting to connect with my daughter. I am standing, but when she answers, when she says, Hi Mom, I sit down and nestle into the cushions of my sofa-peacefully relaxing to her voice. I am comforted.

Our psalmist is seeking to hear the sounds of God, the sounds that tell him that he is not alone. The sounds that tell him he is not forgotten.

He is inconsolable in his suffering, but he believes that God is listening. God will hear him.

1 I will cry aloud to God; *

I will cry aloud, and he will hear me.

2 In the day of my trouble, I sought the Lord; *

My hands were stretched out by night and did not tire;

I refused to be comforted.

Another translation is:

“My soul refuses to be comforted.”

We don't often preach on the Psalms. There is so much good material in the gospels. But this past week has been a bit of a Book of Psalms week for many of you, and for me. So today we will enter into our psalm for comfort and instruction.

The Book of Psalms is a compilation of poems. There are 150 curated in this book. The era of their writing is difficult to date. We know that they were written over a long period of time, from the

Monarchy to the post-exilic period, so 1050 BC-500 BC (Exile 586-538 BC). The authors are unknown, although some of the psalms are attributed to David, Solomon, Moses, and others, or, in the case of our psalm today, to the Asaphites. The Asaphites were a temple musicians' guild. The psalms were also used as hymns.

The overall content of the Psalms is intended to offer instruction about what God is like and to describe how God interacts with the human family. In the Psalms, nations rage against the reign of God. People ignore and subvert righteousness; there is conflict, enemies abound, and many of the writers complain of unfulfilled lives.

The righteous person is defined as one who remains faithful to God's will. All persons or events that get in the way of that relationship of faith are labeled as enemies or deemed wicked.

Ultimately, the main message of the Psalms is that God reigns over all things. And if you notice the prayers that are offered to God in the psalms are done so with the confidence that this is true. That God is the Lord of all things is not questioned. Situations are questioned, but not the sovereignty of God.

I want us to explore one last point concerning the Psalms. Because I think it is so very important to us in our situation today. In the Psalms, the petitioner comes to God and lays out his or her situation. They speak of their pain or conflict. And then in some way, God makes it known what is to come. There will be a reckoning that restores justice—just as there always has been. This is the covenant that God has made with humanity. But the restoration of justice is not immediate. The petitioner must live during the interim time, the time between what is happening now and what God will do about the situation. In the future, God will make it right because God has always made it right. The time between the difficult situation of now and the time when God will make it right is the interim time.

Learning to live faithfully with God in the interim time is probably one of the most difficult challenges of our faith walk. I do not wait well. But I can say that if I must wait, I certainly want to wait with God.

Today's psalm begins as a psalm of Lamentation. It begins with a passionate expression of sorrow.

Lamentations are a cry to God, an appeal to God to be present in our time of need. To Lament is spiritual. It is the language we speak in the midst of suffering. Lamentation comes from a place of humility, and with its raw self-effacement and truth, there is also honor and dignity.

Too often, I think we fear to openly lament. We hold our pain silently and just get on with it.

But perhaps our psalmist can show us a better way.

He knows that in his despair, it is to God whom he must appeal. For just as all things come from God, so too, a renewal or regeneration of new life comes amidst the mystery and majesty of God.

Now, interestingly, after all of our discussion of psalmic petitions, in Psalm 77, there is no specific petition made to God. Also, there are no specific enemies, forces, or threats that are

identified in this psalm. This makes Psalm 77 a little different than many of the others in the Book of Psalms. – and interesting in its own right.

In this case, the psalmist relies on the **history** of God's saving works for reassurance. He reminds himself of situations when God has come through to save the human family. It is a bit like reasoning that God has saved us before, and so maybe God will save us again. And the psalmist finds solace in this history of God's saving works.

He recalls that it has always been God who has been present in the salvation of the human family.

14 You are the God who works wonders *
And have declared your power among the peoples.

And as such, it will be God who once again will be the source of strength for God's people.

And in this memory of what has been, this psalmist knows that in divine strength there is wisdom, guidance, and comfort. Perhaps unseen, undetectable, but eternally present.

We live in troubling times. We must navigate our lives through a broken world. A world where we cannot find peace on a global scale because we cannot make peace in the individual soul.

I propose to you that we must remember that the human family, this great big family that populates on a global scale, is made up of interconnected individuals. When we find peace and healing in our souls, we move all of humanity towards collective healing.

The global human family is not something other than us. It is not some entity that is something untouchable, something outside or bigger than you or me.

God is outside of us, bigger than the human family.

But we, you and I, each of us is an integral piece of the human family. When we are born, the human family is changed. So too when we die. In a similar way, when we choose to love, to be brave, or to help one another, the human family is changed.

Let us also remember that Jesus was not sent by God to be relevant only in Jesus' lifetime. Jesus' message and his death were not solely to save the generation of his era. His ministry, his death, and resurrection were meant to be a message that echoes throughout all generations and into eternity.

When we face the difficulties of our era, we are challenged by God to respond with the sort of courage and love that travels into the next generation and the one after that and the one after that.

We carry out Jesus' ministry of love and justice, not just for what we face today but for what generations will face in the future as well. We push the arc of a moral universe closer to a just world.

Each of our souls cries out to be loved, to be comforted. Cries out to God to bring us peace. In all places, all people seek to heal a hurting soul.

Reach out to God in your times of trouble. Know that God is listening. When Interim time seems too long to bear, be with God. All that is of God. Let yourself be revived by the beauty and the majesty of this divinely created universe that surrounds us. Listen for the sounds of God and know that God will walk with us forward to a better day.

Amen