

Psalm 130 "Navigating Suffering"

Read Psalm 130

1. (vs. 1) The psalmist cries out of the depths. *Read Psalm 69:1-3.* How is this description of drowning in the sea a helpful image to express the agony of feeling overwhelmed by our circumstances?

There are no right or wrong answers here but some thoughts to help spark discussion.

Feeling at the mercy of the wind and the waves

Fearful you will be swallowed up

Cry out for help seems to be drowned out by the howl of the wind.

There is no horizon toward which to expend our energy – all our energy is given to simply staying afloat.

Nothing solid to grab a hold of or bottom under our feet.

Panic rises.

2. (vs. 1-2) There is an incredible amount of emotional honesty in the opening verses – a mixture of despair, doubt, panic, and anger. Why is it so difficult to be open about how we are really doing? What is the benefit of such emotional honesty?

Here is an unedited excerpt from the sermon which may help to trigger conversation...

There is so much that limits us from being honest with our emotions – so much pressure to present ourselves as if we have it all together...

In his book on the psalms of ascent Eugene Peterson speaks of how our culture chokes out such emotional honesty – he says - we live in a time when everyone's goal is to be perpetually healthy and constantly happy – if any one of us fails to live up to the standards that are advertised to be normative, we are labeled as a problem to be solved, and a host of well-intentioned people rush to try out various cures on us.

But to be perpetually healthy and constantly happy is – as Ivan Illich puts it

*- a myth - it denies suffering and pain -devalues the experience of suffering
- and leaves us out of touch with reality.*

But we swim in such a climate - and being part of a faith community often makes it worse - for in religious circles there's a fear in admitting and facing our feelings - why? - well there is often a heretical belief that sits right under the surface - that says - if I'm good God will bless me - If I'm good God will listen to me - so if what is going on inside isn't what we would call good then we can't admit it - so we're unable to bring to light the dark, intense, turbulent feelings.

I have had the experience a number of times as a pastor where someone has come to me for pastoral care - they share with me things they have shared with no one else before - the agony of their family life - or the agony of their internal life - and then they stop coming to church - why? - they tell me they feel exposed - they feel as if everyone else around them has it all together - and in shame they feel disqualified from the company - and I say to them - but they never seem to believe me - you know I look out on a sea of faces on a Sunday - and I might not know all the stories - but everyone has a one - a sorrow - a suffering - a tumultuous heart like your own - me included - there is this cultural and religious pressure to present as if you have it all together - but the psalmist invites us to emotional honesty - to bring our hearts before God squarely - openly - passionately.

Why? Because how can God meet us - how can those around us meet us - if we can't admit to where we really are? If we are to navigate suffering well it first asks of us emotional honesty.

3. (vs. 3-4) The next thing the psalmist invites us to is deep repentance. They take a step back from the circumstances that are causing the despair and examine themselves before the holiness of God. What will be discovered in this? How does the psalmist invite us to deal with what is discovered?

Here is an unedited excerpt from the sermon which may help to trigger conversation...

The psalmist takes a step back from the situation that is causing such despair - holds themself before the holiness of God and asks - where have I gone wrong in this? How have I contributed to this situation? Is there something in this for which I need to take responsibility? Is there an apology that needs to be made? A course correction that needs to be taken? Am I dealing with it in ways that are actually contributing to my sorrow - escaping - numbing - distracting - blaming? Am I reacting to the lack of control I have over this by trying to control that situation or this person over

there?

This work of deep repentance is needed to wisely navigate suffering - Let me give an example - when a marriage or any relationship for that matter fails - very quickly narratives get constructed - right? - you'll ask one of them - what happened - and they'll say - well this person did this that or this other thing - you'll ask the other - what happened - they'll point the finger the other way - well they did this - that - or this other thing - and you know that the story of what happened is probably some combination of the two - but each is trying to cover over their own wrong with the wrong of the other.

Now if they are ever going to navigate from the sorrow of that broken relationship to health not only for themselves - but for any future relationship - acknowledgement of the part they had to play - a turning away from their sin in the situation must happen - in repentance they must honestly examine themselves in light of the holiness of God.

You might say - ugh - why would you even subject yourself to that - the pain of that broken relationship is hard enough without adding the sorrow of your own sin upon it - but again the way up is down - for the psalmist is doing that work - inviting us to that work in light of the next phrase - vs. 4 - for with you God there is a forgiveness that you might be feared - meaning the forgiveness of God is so lavish - restorative - generous - all encompassing - that it leads the psalmist to a place of awe - wonder - reference fear...

Why would we ever settle for covering our sin in blame - well yes I did that - but they did this other worse thing - when our sin can be covered over - and we changed by way of his healing forgiveness!

4. (vs. 6) One of the benefits of such self examination is that you discern where you have influence over your circumstances and where things are far beyond your control. The psalmist then invites us to give those circumstances over to God and then wait. There was no punctuation in Hebrew so if you wanted to emphasize something you would repeat it. The repeated phrase invites us to wait "more than the night watch for the morning". In the sermon Tim gave an image that the psalmist would have been considering as a night watch, the soldier watching the wall. How does image help us to understand what it looks like to wait on the Lord?

The Night watch - A soldier stands upon the wall - eyes piercing the darkness - spear held at the ready - that can be let fly in the face of danger - listening intently for the ladder placed against the rampart - the rope slung over the side - the glint of a drawn blade in the moonlight - without

such attentiveness the lives and livelihood of the citizens of the city would be vulnerable – I wait for the Lord - more than the night watch for the morning.

But Oh how we detest waiting right? – we are a culture of instant gratification – overnight shipping – and express lanes – we find ourselves disappointed when our physician responds to our physical pain with – well diet and exercise with some physio and you should be pain free in 6-8 months – what? - no we want the pill – the surgery – the shorter timeline - we hate waiting.

Most of us wait with fear and anxiety – we wait with our focus locked upon our circumstances – we wait with the ever present concern that we will be swallowed up – we wait stewing about the problem – we wait scheming about solutions - we wait often taking the first exit strategy that presents itself – rarely the wise one – we just want the waiting to end - but the psalmist invites us to wait with a particular posture and hope in our waiting

But this is the particular posture the psalmist invites us to in our waiting – with keen attentiveness not to the dangers of the night – but as we see in the psalm with keen attentiveness to the character of the God that we wait on – his steadfast love – his forgiveness – his mercy – his redemption – his word - his faithfulness to his promises – it is a waiting that is wide awake to God.

The night watch waits not only with a particular posture – but also a particular hope – the night watch for the morning – the guarantee dawn will come – we wait with the promise the Lord will return to make everything new.

5. (vs. 7-8) In these verses there is a shift from singular to plural language – the psalmist points to the necessity of community in our waiting. How does a faith community support us in our waiting on the Lord?

Where we can't focus on the character of God or the hope of a certain dawn in the midst of our depths we can have a community come around us and through their words and actions point us to these realities.

In the sermon Tim gave the following quote from a former bishop of Liverpool – J.C. Ryle – it might help to read this quote as part of the discussion to trigger the conversation. One of the things a community can do is by prayer and song and proclamation is root us in an assurance of who God is – what he has done for us – and what he has promised to do.

"Now assurance goes far to set a child of God free – it enables us to feel that the great business of life is a settled business, the great debt a paid debt, the great disease a healed disease, and the great work a finished work; and all other business, diseases, debts, and works, are then by comparison small. In this way assurance makes us patient in tribulation, calm under bereavements, unmoved in sorrow, not afraid of evil tidings, in every condition content, for it gives us a fixedness of heart. It sweetens our bitter cups, it lessens the burden of our crosses, it smooths the rough places over which we travel, and it lightens the valley of the shadow of death. It makes us always feel that we have something solid beneath our feet, and something firm under our hands – a sure friend by the way, and a sure home at the end."

There would be wisdom perhaps in speaking of how a community has helped you in the midst of the depths – what practices work – which don't – and why?