

IN GRATITUDE

Based on Psalm 22:22-31

The writer of today's Psalm is a man who has seen difficult times. In the section prior to our lesson, he moved from despair, even deeper into the depths of hopelessness.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me... (v1)

O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer... (v2)

But I am a worm, and not human... (v6)

All who see me mock at me... (v7)

I am poured out like water...

my heart is like wax...(v14)

My mouth is dried up...my

tongue sticks to my jaws...

(v15)

And so it goes, the writer sinking deeper and deeper into a darkness we wonder if he will ever find his way out of. So compelling are this Psalmist's cries, that it's echoes are spoken by Christ himself, generations later, on the cross of Calvary, according to the Gospel of Matthew. We do not know what this man's troubles were. We do not know what drove him to such despair. But we do know, that he did not linger there.

Somewhere in the depths of darkness, amid feelings of unworthiness, shame, fear, remorse, and let's say it, a healthy dose of self-pity and a bit of feeling sorry for himself, the Psalmist turned his thoughts around, and began

to think instead, of gratitude for his God. "Gratitude," you might ask? "How did we move from the depths of despair to gratitude." Well now, that's the million-dollar question I would like to know the answer to. Most striking to me is Verse 24:

*For he [God] did not despise or
abhor the affliction of the
afflicted;
he did not hide his face from
me, but heard when I cried to
him.*

The Psalmist realized that while he found himself in a particularly difficult place in life at the moment, he was not the only one in the world in such a situation. He realized also, that for all the trouble swirling around him, God had never left his side. God did not abandon him. God continued on with him, even in the middle of the mess.

It did not change the Psalmist's situation, whatever that may have been.

It did not make the troubles disappear.

It did not make future challenges any less.

But it did mean that he could face them, knowing he did not do it alone.

And because of that, he was able to turn to his 'community': His family? His friends? His village? And proclaim with gratitude, all

that God had done for him.

The more he proclaimed, and remembered the promises from God, the more calm he became about his current situation; the more excited he became, knowing that his story was part of the great story of faith that generations after him would come to hear and understand.

*Posterity will serve him; future
generations will be told about
the Lord, and
proclaim his deliverance to a
people yet unborn, saying that
he has done it. (v30-31)*

We live in a fast paced world filled with anxiety. As a society, the faster we move, the more technology we have to organize ourselves, the more opportunities and options we have to travel, to learn, to share, in fact; the more lonely we are becoming. The more isolated from each other. We are pushing each other away. We are more fearful now than in the past, of new things, our neighbors, ideas and people we don't understand.

Trouble takes its turn, and comes knocking on everyone's door, at some point. No one escapes. You are no better or worse than anyone else in this matter. Trouble is simply part of life. But when our turn arrives, and we are already anxious about the world or the

circumstances we find ourselves in, darkness settles on our heart quickly. Shadows become larger. Obstacles appear insurmountable. We lose our bearings, and fall into despair. Many simply throw up their hands, and give up on life, choosing instead to linger in the shadows of life, instead of drinking deeply of the beauty of life. This is where the Psalmist found himself at the beginning of his lament: *Save me from the mouth of the lion! (v21)*

But here is the answer to the million-dollar question. The Psalmist did not linger at the mouth of the lion, waiting for more trouble to arrive. Nor do you have to linger in the shadows, even if you feel life is not going your way. Because you have a story to tell. It is your story, and it is filled with treasured memories, photo albums of

family trips, life changing opportunities, and warm sunny afternoons in the backyard. It is a story you must tell, so that those who come after you, may remember them as well.

And whether or not you realized it at the time, your Creator was walking with you in those memories, as He walks with you now. Perhaps today, life is beating a comfortable rhythm for you. Perhaps life is nearing a crossroad: a change of direction, something new or different on the horizon. Perhaps you are in agony over a matter you are keeping tightly held down within you, so that no one may even glimpse the truth. However it is you find yourself this Lenten season, remember the invitation to leave a burden or two along the path to the cross. You don't need to hold it or carry

it any longer. Today as you continue towards Jerusalem, I say to you, "Do not linger in difficult places." Live a life of gratitude. Choose to see the blessings of the day. Choose to live with gratitude for all that you have come to know and understand, for all the things your Creator has shown you about life and about people. Choose to live in hope.

Do not linger in the difficult places.

Live life fully.

In Gratitude.

You are not alone.

Amen.

today's lesson is taken from the New
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