

# In the darkest night, I wait for you

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Psalm 130 Ephesians 4:25-5:10; John 6:25, 41-51

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Out of the depth, I cry for you says the anguished voice of our psalmist. As a chaplain, how often have I heard that. When people are in the bottom of the grief barrel and it's going over the falls... they often ask me, "where is God?" I can't see him. I feel abandoned.

And along with the feeling of emptiness – the hole that was once another person in their life, is a darkness where God's light is just not visible. How can this happen to me? How can God take away the person or people I care most about? I am alone because no one can understand or feel my grief.

But not in this psalm. In this psalm, the poet sings – I will wait for you. With you, there is healing and forgiveness and all things whole – so I paraphrase, I will just sit here quietly, like a watchman and wait for you.

The truth is, in the cry of anguish and when we are hurting, we revert to the thoughts and behaviours we had as a child. Remember Paul saying, <sup>11</sup>“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. <sup>12</sup>For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”<sup>1</sup>

And that reading starts with, <sup>10</sup>“but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.”

When we hurt, we revert to the fix-it God of our childhood. A child has a wonderful father-like image who can do anything and make everything better. An adult understands the God who watched his only son die in agony.

To a child parents have magical powers, a kiss will make a cut stop hurting. And that is the God we turn to in distress.

Not the one who sits beside us in the dark

Not the one who knows more grief than we can imagine

Not the one who weeps

Or the one who knows us completely -

Not the one who waits patiently for us

To turn again, turn again... to him.

As the psalmist says, not the one who keeps a record of our sins –

But the one who is forgiving,

Waits patiently.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:10-12

Ours is not the God of parking spaces that magically appear. Jesus was annoyed that people were distracted by the miracles rather than seeing them as a way of getting their attention – to point to God.

In our reading of the loaves and fishes and the following reading last week, Jesus is the bread of life<sup>2</sup> – Jesus rebukes the public who want to make him king. Just a different Caesar. One that's more fun. But it is easy to understand. Dictators past and present use bread and circuses<sup>3</sup> to distract impoverished audiences. Herod, like those before him would hand out bread and entertain people with public spectacles such as parades and sporting events. If you can be distracted for an hour or two, you will forget about the high taxes, oppression and injustices.

Sometimes we don't want a wise God, we'd rather a dictator who will fix the footpaths and lower taxes.

Psalm 130 is David's response to the death of Absalom, his feared rebel and treasured son. David is literally "in the depths" of his grief and it is not at all marked by guilt but rather is a cry of impotence and helplessness in the face of his loss<sup>4</sup>. Yes, there is self-pity and, in a way, it is a primal scream. But I will not condemn him for his moment of self-pity. How could I? There has to be a time of self-care where we DO lick our wounds and pay homage to our scars. It is only the question of degree or length that moves it from an act of self-care to a weapon or an excuse.

Can we, for a moment, imagine David's primal scream piercing God's sphere of steadfast love where it is transformed into hope. That's what happens in this Psalm.

Remember that Ephesians is a series of letters, instruction manuals, suggesting how communities should establish themselves, organise their affairs and act like they are part of this new movement. They may have been wondering "What makes a Christian community? "What does it look like organisationally?" In the previous chapter, Paul is preaching about living the new life. Well, what is that like? How will I know when I'm living it?

So the author of this section tries to put flesh on the bones and answer some of these questions. It tries to identify specific ethical commandments that would to insiders and outsiders alike, show how this movement is different; show how it is an access to a new life – even a better life. By these behaviours, the Christian identity will be revealed.

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<sup>2</sup> John 6:24-35

<sup>3</sup> In fact, the term bread and circuses was coined by a Roman satirical poet who described it as *panem et circenses*, that is, in English, "bread and circuses."

<sup>4</sup> Brueggemann, Cousar et al, *Texts for Preaching*, Year B, p460

Most revealing is the sentence “do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption”. In this strange line, the writer is reminding people that while we are tied to Jesus, God’s grief is God’s. We cannot live our Christian life crippled with anger at the injustice of Jesus death. We should celebrate his life – not revenge death. Indeed, that we have to move beyond all those human failings of rage, bitterness and any form of malice towards another. To be washed clean of those unhealthy passions.

To do that, sometimes we have to sit in the darkness ...and wait<sup>5</sup>.

So it is no accident that “I am the bread of life” passage comes right after the loaves and fishes. Jesus is hammering home a teaching moment that says ‘do not be distracted by the bread and circuses’. There is more meaning in bread and fed that the people were missing. Again, he is making it clear – Moses did not send down manna, God did. No one can come to me because of some fancy-dancy trick I’ve pulled. They will come because God draws them. ‘Everyone who has heard the father and learned from him comes to me...’

In other words, you can’t argue or impress someone into believing Jesus is anything more than a boy from Nazareth. Evangelizing is just loud words and music unless there is something more that makes a human wake up. It may be that as we are in the world attracts attention but there is one that must move them... and that is the Holy Spirit. God calls. I might say something that flicks open an ear or two, but it is God and God alone, who makes something happen in a person. My words are just warmth for the yeast.

Jesus says he is the living bread that came down from heaven and he offers a feast to give life to the world. We are offered his share again and again.

I pray, as a chaplain sitting in dark places with so many that the warmth of my body reminds them that there is another down there with us. All we have to do is wait. As he waits – for us to put out our hearts and reconnect. Together we can all sit in grief until the sun comes up and light slowly begins to enter that very, very dark place.

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<sup>5</sup> That’s why I so appreciate Easter Saturday traditions – a whole day set aside to sit in the darkness and deal with very complex feelings.