

Akron Christian Reformed Church

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Psalm 130; 2 Corinthians 1.3-11; John 14.15-18

“Waiting In the Depths”

Prayer for Illumination: We’ve come here today, dear Lord, for a number of different reasons. Some of them good, some of them tainted, and some of them unclear even to ourselves. But we come here knowing that we need to discover you.

So here we are God waiting for your Word and Spirit. Waiting to recognize your presence. Waiting to feel your love. Please, make yourself known to us in the speaking of your Word and the breaking of your bread. Open our eyes and hearts to the mystery of your presence among us and within us. Remove from us the stumbling blocks that we place in the way. Overcome us. Overwhelm us. Overshadow us. Amen.

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

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I wonder: How do we know when we’re in the depths? Conversely, how do we know when we’ve been pulled from them?

Perhaps this will help. How do we know when we’ve recovered from a recession? And, how do we know when we haven’t been pulled from it yet?

The depths are kinda like that. Very real, but their edges aren’t well defined. By the time we know that we’ve been swallowed, we’re deep into the depths. By the time we know that we’ve escaped, we’ve been free for a while.

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The answer that an Old Testament worshiper would give is: “When life turns completely upside down and against us, and we’re living in exile, then we know that we’re in the depths. Conversely, when life again becomes sweet and good, and we’re back in Jerusalem, then we know that we’ve been pulled from them.”

Psalm 130 was placed among the group of 15 Psalms of Ascent and set aside as something to contemplate as the Jewish worshiper traveled to the Temple twice a year. But some of these “traveling to the temple Psalms” were written after the temple was destroyed from the confines of the Babylonian exile.

The Jews living in Babylon are in the depths. They’re slaves. Their land is inhabited by the heathen. Their beautiful temple is destroyed. Their unique identity is robbed from them. They’ve been swallowed up. And the heathen Babylonians even have the audacity to demand sweet songs from them, so they hang up their harps in the trees and weep. (Psalm 137) God’s people are mired in the depths.

And they understand that the reason they’re in the depths is because of their own sin. The individual sins of the people as they abandoned the LORD God to worship the Baal. The corporate sins of the leaders who oppressed the poor, persecuted the weak, preyed upon the alien, took to court the widow and neglected the orphan. All of this sin has led to great suffering. These Old Testament people know why they’re mired in the depths.

So, from the depths of misery they cry out to the Lord: For salvation. For freedom. For return to their beloved Temple and their holy city. Then they wait. They wait.

They wait more than watchmen who sit back patiently studying the night sky for the edges of dawn. The people of the Lord wait, in the middle of their darkness for the edge of dawn, they wait for the Lord to pull them back into his sweetness.

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But the question is, how did they know that the Lord would come like the dawn? How did they know that the Lord would relent? How did they know that the Lord would set them free? How did they

know that the Lord would lift them up, out of the depths? Because everything seems so hopeless. The Lord seems gone forever. How did they know?

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They know because “if you, Lord, kept a record of sins, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness.” In Hebrew you get the idea that the Lord doesn’t watch for sin the same way that the watchman fervently watches for the dawn. Literally, “If you Lord watched [like a watchman], if you Lord watched for a record of sins, who could stand?”

The Psalmist knows that even as the worshiper watches for God’s grace to come as the morning, God does **not** watch their sin. The Psalmist is confident of this, so he encourages the people to wait, filled with anticipation, because their God does not harbor grudges. Their God does not keep a record of sin. They know this.

They may be in exile, they may be in the depths because of their own sin, but they know, with great confidence, that the Lord has not abandoned them there.

Listen to the powerful sureness that the Psalmist has that the Lord does not watch for sin and punish forever. The last two verses say:

Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem [his people] from all their sins. (v. 7)

There is no fear of a vengeful God of punishment in these words. There’s no hopeless thought that the depths are where they will remain forever. “Put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption.” Even though the people are presently in misery, they know that the Lord is faithful and loving and merciful. The Psalmist is confident of this. So, in the future, the pilgrims on their way to worship in Jerusalem, even as they leave exile, are to contemplate this reality. “With the Lord there is unfailing love.”

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We’ve all experienced the depths created by our own sinfulness, haven’t we? Haven’t you from time to time, begun to pray and the only thing you can do is confess sin and cower at your own unworthiness? We’ve experienced the depths because of the guilt of what we’ve done and the shame of it all, and because we know who we are and how corrupted we really are. Being in the holy presence of God has a way of illustrating **our** unholiness – which is why we have a section of penitence in our liturgy. We’ve all experienced that, right?

“But with the Lord there is forgiveness.” With the Lord grace abounds. We’ve all been picked up and cleaned off, time after time, by our loving Savior.

So, when your sin drives you to your knees – wait for the Lord, because he will pick you up. I think that we New Testament people understand this even better than the Old. Wait for the Lord, because he will pick you up.

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But there are other depths, aren’t there. Depths that aren’t really created by our own sinfulness. Depths that exist because life is often amazingly difficult to navigate.

- There’s the depths of financial calamity that sometimes chokes the breath out of us and covers us with a dark cloud.
- There’s the depths of sorrow when someone we love dies which creates a hole so big in our life that we don’t know how we’ll go on.
- There’s the depths of depression that drives all sense of hope from our lives.
- There’s the depths of uncertainty created by the loss of work that pushes us towards financial decisions that are ruinous.
- There’s the depths of fear that haunt our every move so that we become paralyzed and find any new decision to be overwhelming. So we stop deciding anything.

Truly, there are other depths. And we’ve all descended into one or two of them.

The Psalmist teaches us, that from within all of our depths, we are to cry out to the Lord for help, then wait, watch, and wait some more, because the Lord is gracious and loving and kind, and he will lift us up.

Anne Lamott in her book *Traveling Mercies*, says that one night, as she inventoried her life, she recognized the depths that she'd descended into. She was devastated at what she discovered. She'd led a wild life. She was a self-proclaimed alcoholic and drug user. She was pregnant with the baby of her married lover. She had alienated most of her friends and even her own family was abandoning her. Plus her best friend was dying of cancer, and Lamott felt more alone than she'd ever felt before.

She cried out to the darkness for help. She writes:

After a while, as I lay there, I became aware of someone with me, hunkered down in the corner. The feeling was so strong that I actually turned on the light for a moment to make sure no one was there – of course, there wasn't. But after a while, in the dark again, I knew beyond any doubt that it was Jesus....I felt him just sitting there on his haunches in the corner of my sleeping loft, watching me with patience and love.

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Are you in some sort of depths? Do you feel yourself slipping towards the depths? Wait for the Lord. Watch for him. For he will surely come. Indeed, the Lord is already present with you. You just haven't discovered the Lord yet.

We're often slow at recognizing the Lord's presence because he rarely does what we moan for him to do for us. We cry to be healed and the powers driving us down to be destroyed and miraculously removed. When in reality, the Lord usually chooses to hunker down close to us, watching us, being with us, loving us. It takes time to discover the Lord sitting there in the corner of our life when we really want him to be spectacular.

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Bring yourself up here now to this table. But don't do so out of habit without a thought in your heart or head. Come up here waiting and watching for the Lord. Come up here honestly ready to see the presence of Jesus, the body of Christ, waiting patiently for you to recognize him, as he is revealed in his people around the table and in this wine and bread. Come up here and taste that the Lord is good.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.