

## Out of the Depths

Psalm 130                      Crossroads Christian Church  
John 6:35, 41-51              Aug. 9, 2015 Pentecost 11B

I want to spend most of my time today not with the second reading, the Gospel, but with Psalm 130. Some call it by its Latin name, *de profundis*. And it is profound. It speaks to our deepest needs and longings. Let me read it to you again, in the New Revised Standard Version.

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my supplications!

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,

Lord, who could stand?

But there is forgiveness with you,

so that you may be revered.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,

and in his word I hope;

my soul waits for the Lord

more than those who watch for the morning,

more than those who watch for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the Lord!

For with the Lord there is steadfast love,

and with him is great power to redeem.

It is he who will redeem Israel

from all its iniquities.

This Psalm has always been one of the most popular, I think, because it begins where we are. It doesn't gloss over the pain, the grief, the anger, the confusion of the human situation. It begins where we often are, in the depths. It meets us there. Our inner pain and its pain meet. "Out of the depths I cry."

It's strange how human language uses metaphors of depth and height to indicate sorrow and joy. "I'm down in the dumps. I'm feeling low. I'm depressed. I'm in the pits." Or, on the other hand, "I had a mountain top experience. I feel high. I'm floating in air. I was really up for the game."

This Psalm takes us on a journey from the depths to a mountain top. It's one of a group of Psalms called Psalms of Ascent. Ascent means going up, like ascending a hill. Back when the Psalm was written, when people wanted to go to God's house to pray, they didn't go down the street to a local church, they traveled to Jerusalem, a city set on a hill, Mount Zion. The people would travel together—make a

pilgrimage, a journey, on roads that led through dark valleys and eventually climbed the mountain to Jerusalem. Pilgrims sang as they travel to the Lord's House, they sang these songs of ascent, Psalms 120-134. In those dark canyons where thieves and robbers might be lurking behind the rocks, they sang to remind themselves to trust in God. They sang of hope. Then, as they came to the gates of the city, they sang for joy, for their journeys were completed safe and sound, and they could enter the temple's courts to worship God. Their geographical journey parallels the spiritual journey of the psalm itself, a spiritual journey we all take.

Psalm 130 begins in the depth of human sin and separation. We feel far from God, and all we can do is cry, hoping God hears us. But we can hope. We can trust that God is not only in the glorious temple at the end of the journey, but God is also with us in this dark valley of life. Out of the depths I cry to you O Lord, Lord, hear my voice. We wouldn't bother to ask God to hear our voices if we didn't trust that God would hear us, that God could hear us, that God cared. So God listens. But then we remember how we got to the depths in the first place, often by our own failures, our own sin, our own lack of faith or love. We may think of our own failure, but then we think of God's mercy. "If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, who could stand? But there is forgiveness in you." If God judged harshly, even fairly, who could stand? Who could measure up? Then comes a glimmer of hope. Maybe we can find a glimmer of mercy, of hope. We can hope that God will meet us in our grief and walk with us, will forgive us and redeem us. We can wait for the Lord! "My soul waits for the Lord, more than those who watch for the morning." Think of waiting beside a sick child's bed, waiting, hoping, that the child's fever will break. Think of what it would be like to be lost in the woods, having to spend the night because it's too dangerous to walk in the dark. The sky is so dark. When will it be light again? Then, there's a lightening. The black in the east turns to charcoal, then to gray. Then pale streams of color rise, and soon we can see the way home. On our spiritual journeys, then, we wait with eagerness, we have a sense of hopefulness. It's still dark, but we know light is coming. In our eager waiting, we're like the child in the back seat, who asks, "Are we there yet?" Or the child on Christmas Eve or morning, asking, "Is it time to open the presents yet?" We wait upon the Lord, more than a watchman waits for the morning. Then finally, the psalmist celebrates God's steadfast love, God's ability to redeem Israel. We're in Jerusalem now. We're at the Lord's House, we stand as a redeemed, joyous, faithful people, redeemed by God. "O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love"—a love that never gives up. This is the God who will redeem the nation, who will free the people from the consequences of

sin. So the journey starts in the low places of the human heart, and ends on God's mountaintop.

What a beautiful picture the Psalm draws, that no matter how bad things are, God is with us, God guides us, God protects us, God comforts us, God redeems us.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus continues to build upon the theme, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (6:35) At the beginning of the chapter, Jesus gave the crowds physical food. Last Sunday and now he's giving them, and us, food for thought. Jesus goes on a mile a minute about what it means to be and to receive the bread of life, and his listeners are trying to sort it out. What does it mean? It was too much for some of those in the crowd, and they began to grumble. First, they raised the question, "Isn't this Jesus who says he came down from heaven the same Jesus we saw grow up as a kid in Nazareth? Who does he think he is, anyway?" And Jesus answers again, both a confrontation and an invitation, "I am the bread of life." Remember how John keeps lifting up those "I am" sayings, tying Christ back to what God said at Sinai, "I am Yahweh—I am who I am"? And Jesus escalates the discussion in verse 51: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." We know about communion now. But then, those listening must have thought that Jesus had gone off the deep end. Literally, it sounds crazy. Jesus adds that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood to find life in God, which just adds fuel to the fire. Jesus was challenging them to go beyond literal understanding to a spiritual understanding. Jesus was trying to get them—and us—to understand the sacrifice that he would one day make upon the cross, and how that sacrifice would give us eternal life. God would feed us the food of eternal life. And every Sunday we accept Jesus' invitation to be fed.

We Disciples affirm that at the Lord's Table, we have the sign of God's presence, the sign of God's steadfast love, the sign that the Jesus who died on the cross is the Christ who breaks bread with us now. Here we have an invitation to receive the bread of heaven, the only bread that can give fullness of life now and for eternity. We don't have to walk the road to Jerusalem, for Jerusalem, the Upper Room, has come to us. God not only travels with us, God breaks bread with us.

We cry out from the depths, and we find that Christ was there before us, and is there now with us, that we will walk the road to the Holy City together. And every time we break bread with him, we remember that he is the living bread, and we look forward to the time

beyond time when all God's children celebrate the great feast in  
heaven. Amen.

By Michael E.Dixon