

A Narrative 42, 2019
June 23, 2019
Poulsbo
Pastor Alison Shane

Psalm 69:1-16

Taize song:

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!

As Pastor Kent mentioned last week, the Psalms were Israel's hymnal, and they remain our song book as well. They are still the first 150 hymns in our hymnal, though the musical setting must be supplied by us if we are to sing them together. We keep them as part of our book of faith and book of worship because they still resonate with us in faith today. When we are happy, there are praise psalms. When we need encouragement, we can find it there. When we feel like the whole world is conspiring against us, a lament psalm is just the thing to make us feel like we are not alone.

And the lament psalms almost always turn to praise at the end, reminding us that even in our darkness, God hears, God comes, God stays, God saves.

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.

Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!

"Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck." Ever feel like you're drowning? It's so common a feeling, we have common metaphors for the experience. We are "up to our neck" in work or "up to our ears" in worry. We are "swamped." We are "mired." "Wave after wave" of hardships hit us. We are barely "keeping our head above water." And when things are going well, we are "swimming along" or even "surfing." When things are same ol', same ol', we are "just treading water."

"Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God."

Life gets hard. Work or school or our daily chores threaten to overwhelm us. We lift our voices to God, and...nothing. "Answer me, God! Do not let the flood sweep over me!" And the psalmist reminds us: God hears, God comes, God stays, God saves.

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Sometimes it's the very work of living that gets hard. Our bodies break down. We are no longer able to do the things we once did. We find ourselves spending half our lives in the waiting room at the clinic. Cancer rocks our world. There is no cure. We lift our voices to God, and...nothing. "Answer me, God! Do not let the flood sweep over me!" And the psalmist reminds us: God hears, God comes, God stays, God saves.

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Relationships are hard. Some grow weary waiting for someone with whom to share life. Some struggle with relationships with children or parents. Some struggle to get out of abusive

relationships. We lift our voices to God, and...nothing. "Answer me, God! Do not let the flood sweep over me!" And the psalmist reminds us: God hears, God comes, God stays, God saves.

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Faith can be hard. Following Christ can be hard. Just being a person of faith is the specific sorrow the psalmist names. "I did everything you asked of me, God, and now everybody hates me because they hate you. They hate you, and they're taking it out on me." I feel like this is a lament particularly applicable to this time. So many people in this world are angry with the God of Christians. And before I lose you, it's NOT because of their own faith, but because Christians themselves have been making a bad name for our God. Christians, acting in the name of Christ, have behaved quite contrary to Jesus himself. Christians have caged people for some perceived sin instead of freeing them with the gospel. Christians have built walls to protect ourselves instead of sacrificing everything as Jesus did. Christians have alienated and denied and ignored and otherwise acted exactly opposite of the Jesus of scripture. And while some of us are starting to recognize the error of our ways, we remain complicit by our silence. And this is how the world sees the God of Christians.

So yes, faith is hard. Following Christ is swimming upstream, not because the culture is against us, but because we are fighting against assumptions placed against us. Following Christ is swimming upstream because we are having to redefine ourselves over against our brothers. We can do what God calls us to do and still find ourselves hated and maligned. Why doesn't God just reach in and fix this??? We lift our voices to God. "Answer me, God! Do not let the flood sweep over me!"

And the psalmist reminds us: God hears, God comes, God stays, God saves.

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Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!

Life is hard. Living is hard. Relationships are hard. Faith is hard. Sometimes the psalmist's turn from lament to praise feels inauthentic. "Hang on, I'm still angry here! I'm still in pain here! I'm not ready to praise yet."

But sometimes that turn to praise is God reorienting us so that we can see God at work.

Sometimes that turn is God opening us, putting us in a place where we are capable of hearing. Because the truth is that even when we cannot see God's hand, even when we cannot hear God's voice, God is still there, acting and speaking. Our faith is that God is near, that God is here. We scream, we cry, we rant...because we know that God saves. God is big enough to take our emotion. We can be strong and take heart, because truly, God hears, God comes, God stays, God saves.

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Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!