

### **Psalm 130**

A Song of Ascents.

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

2 Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my supplications!

3 If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,

Lord, who could stand?

4 But there is forgiveness with you,

so that you may be revered.

5 I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,

and in his word I hope;

6 my soul waits for the Lord

more than those who watch for the morning,

more than those who watch for the morning.

7 O Israel, hope in the Lord!

For with the Lord there is steadfast love,

and with him is great power to redeem.

8 It is he who will redeem Israel

from all its iniquities.

### **Introduction:**

“You go to bed at night and its dark outside, and it feels dark inside. All the creative energy is gone, it just isn’t there. And when you awake in the morning, although it is dawn, inside nothing has changed and it is still dark.”

Another person put it like this:

“It was like looking out on a landscape that was total desolation; where once there had been growth and possibilities, now there was just nothing! Just nothing but desolation. Words can’t really describe it...”

And yet another said, echoing the words of the Gospel:

“Jesus you are the bread of life, why is my soul still so hungry?”

These are descriptions of the depths... Despair...

Its an experience of the body (unable to sleep, no appetite, no energy),

It is an experience of the mind (feeling worthless, plagued by negative thoughts, unable to make decisions and concentrate)...

But depression (as we have come to know it) is also VERY MUCH a spiritual experience.

And so as a church, as a spiritual community we need to discover a response to the depression experience...

For some of us, depression is a topic that is hard to talk about... either we have experienced it first hand or have journeyed closely with others as they have walked through this experience. The topic may become too overwhelming for you. ... please be free to follow your needs here this morning... step outside for a breath but please don't remain all alone today.

Because depression is an experience of the body we learn from psychiatry and seek its medication, because depression is an experience of the mind we learn from psychology and seek its counsel,

but depression as a spiritual experience, requires us also to learn from the wisdom of our scriptures and Judeo-Christian tradition.

**And today I want us to reflect on depression guided by the prayer of Psalm 130.**

The Psalms, an early prayer book, gathered and passed down by our Jewish and Christian Ancestors as our response book to God.

And so in a time of joy and thanksgiving Psalm 150 could help us to praise God with musical instruments...

In times of despair when we don't know what to say, we can turn to Psalm 130.

Psalm 130 can be a guide...

**And it begins... Out of the depths...**

In the Hebrew scriptures the depths or deep waters was a metaphorical or poetic image of chaos.

It would be like us saying I feel like I am drowning... you are not actually drowning in water but the internal feeling of being overwhelmed is LIKE internal drowning.

Being in the depths has this same sense...

The same words are used in Psalm 69...

“Save me O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths, where I have no foothold. I have come into the deep waters, the folds engulf me”

Probably most of us in this room can remember a time in our lives where we felt like this, even if it lasted just for a moment... because despair (being in the depths) is part of what it means to be human...

It is a myth that says we always have to be happy...

Experiencing the depths (at least for some time) gives us a different way of seeing the world and insights that we would never have had otherwise:

The great philosopher and founder of existentialism, Soren Kierkegard wrote most of his works in his depression.

The German reformer Martin Luther stood up for the people against the powerful abusive Catholic Church of the 1500's – why because he himself felt deep despair and felt their plight.

Jesus went into the depths (saying Psalm 22 - my God my God why have you forsaken me),

Jeremiah, David, Jonah, ... it is part of being alive...

Now I want to acknowledge that there are different levels of despair or depression.

This depend on how long we feel this way and how much of life we can participate in while we feel this way (functioning).

No matter how deep we go this is a hard place to be - in the depths... it is the pits... and in it we feel very alone.

When depression draws us into ourselves, it is often a silent place...

And the Psalmist's poetic wisdom to us, invites us to break the silence

**Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.**

Do you notice that the Psalm begins in the first person... Out of the depths 'I' cry...

Yet the Psalms are said 'together' as common prayer.

This Psalm is one of the Psalms of ascent said as communities of Jewish people moved toward Jerusalem for holy days and feasts.

So though this cry goes out from an individual to God, it is done together, in community... alone but IN community...

**It takes courage to cry out and be honest about how we are feeling...**

**Will God judge me? Will people judge me?**

**There is so much stigma around depression...**

**And it is often associated with weakness...**

And yet, my friends, it is actually the opposite... it takes strength and courage to live just a moment of life in the depths.

I believe that depression is only stigmatized because we all fear going there... yet those of us who walk the road of depression are courageous ones.

What about faith? Is acknowledging depression admitting an inferior faith or spirituality?

Author, Eugene Peterson writes:

“A Christian is a person who has not decided to ignore suffering or despair but one who has decided to face it and live through it.”

Psalm 130 is a prayer that gives dignity to our despair – it is **not** something to be silenced in a community, or before the Holy One - it is something to be spoken out...

**Out of the depths I cry...“Oh Lord, Hear my voice, Let your ears be attentive”**

In the midst of despair we feel like God is far away...

It is a time of brute honesty, no pretence...

One person said:

“You are going along living your life as normally as you can when suddenly all your assumptions, presuppositions and in some cases values are called into question, so that everything gets tossed up in the air”

Approaching God out of the depths, takes great courage, and great faith...

In spite of doubt we still cry out.

**The Psalmist also reminds us to cry out for mercy... because God does not keep a record of wrongs.**

AND In the depths we understand our own failings very well.

In the pit of despair our own shortcomings are often all we can think about...

Negative thoughts about ourselves circulate each minute and we wish we could just stop thinking – And listening to these thoughts is often paralyzing...

And so with such an acute awareness of our own failure, we begin to doubt whether God will accept us...

**If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?**

And while some guilt is true and we confess and God forgives;

much of the plaguing guilt of depression is a reminder of things done years and years ago.

Already forgiven, AND God does not keep a record of wrongs.

And even though you may not feel or sense it, you are accepted, you are loved.

*Cry out – God hears you and the Holy One is full of mercy!*

**The Psalmist also can guide our reflections as a community responding to despair...**

As caring people, when we see someone in the depths, we wish we could say the right prayer and the person would magically be ok.

BUT it doesn't seem to work like that... instead...

**wait for the Lord, wait for a Word**

**More than watchmen wait for the morning...**

**More than (ones who watch) wait for the morning**

We are encouraged to follow the person's lead... as they are waiting...

**We are the ones who keep watch and wait with our friend in despair...**

And we offer signs that the dawn is coming.

**While our friend is in the darkest of nights, we are positioned at the dawn.**

Jurgen Moltman writes: “[Christian community] is not set at the high noon of life, but at the dawn of a new day, things passing and things to come, grapple with each other....”

We are positioned at the dawn..

As a teenager, I remember going on summer camps and staying up all night. We would stock up on candy and chips from the tuck shop and eat, chat and laugh all

night. Usually at about 4 in the morning we would make our way to a little hill, wrapped in blankets with flasks of Rooibos tea.

And there we would sit and wait for the signs of the morning. We would hear the roosters crowing, we would listen to the crickets stop chirping and the birds beginning to tweet. And slowly the stars would disappear. And just then in the most Eastern part a sliver of light would appear... the rising sun... it didn't fail us again... the dawn had come.

**We wait. As ones who watch, wait for the morning...**

We watch for incremental signs of recovery:

- an appreciation of colour
- the first savouring of food
- a spontaneous idea
- a smile

**Through the long dark night of the soul, we offer our presence as Christ's light, hope and unfailing love.**

**For in the depths we know that it is God and only God who has the breathe of life.**

**Amen.**