

July 2, 2023 SERMON

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Good morning! "What starts with a sigh and ends with a song?" I'll give you a hint... we have heard it today.

"How long, O Lord? Will you forget me for ever?

how long will you hide your face from me? "

And at the end we heard...

"I will sing to the Lord, for he has dealt with me richly:

I will praise the Name of the Lord Most High."

I was a theatre major in college. I love the drama, the comedy, the love, the laughter, the tears and the joy found in the Psalms. And sometimes, like today, found in one Psalm.

Today I want to sell you on the Psalms. I want to share with you how this ancient songbook sings for me in hopes that it will sing for you, too.

Many of the psalms, like Psalm 13, are attributed to David. You remember David, born the youngest son of Jesse, became a shepherd and a talented harpist who was chosen by King Saul to fight the Philistine, Goliath. Living around 1000 BCE, David married the King's daughter, became a source of jealousy for King Saul who eventually wanted David killed; so, David went into hiding. David had a minor transgression with Bathsheba, sent an innocent man to the front lines of the war to be killed, became King of all Israel and in his spare time, some believe, wrote Psalms. We don't know that he is the author of the Psalms as the attributions were added many years after the Psalms were written. But, we do know that many of the Psalms line up with adventures and mis-adventures in the life of David.

No matter who wrote the Psalms, they capture the human condition that has not changed in over 3000 years – life can be hard, sometimes we feel tested by God, but God is with us *always* and we should sing his praises today and every day because truly, we are blessed.

And they capture the desire of man to be in relationship with the one true God and to worship him in love and joy, like Psalm 100, The Jubilate that we also heard today. The one that starts, "Be joyful in the Lord."

This Psalm is one of my favorites and I find when I read it, I am lifted on dark days and affirmed of the joy in my heart when everything is going well.

The Psalms are poetry, prose, praise, and purgatory. If you have felt an emotion, you will find it in the psalms.

Priest, professor, author and theologian Henri Nouwen wrote of the Psalms,

*“Many times I have thought: If I am ever sent to prison, if I am ever subjected to hunger, pain, torture, or humiliation, I hope and pray that they let me keep the Psalms. The Psalms will keep my spirit alive, the Psalms will allow me to comfort others, the Psalms will prove the most powerful, yes, the most revolutionary **weapon against the oppressor and torturer. How happy are those** who no longer need books but carry the Psalms in their heart wherever they are and wherever they go,”*

Have you ever memorized a Psalm? Do you carry a psalm in your heart?

Growing up we had Morning Prayer much more than Holy Eucharist and so I was able to memorize the Jubilate, Psalm 100. Unfortunately, the version that I memorized was from the King James translation of the Bible so it doesn't help me in our worship service, but it is in my heart. If it is in your heart, say it with me...

*Be joyful in the Lord, all ye lands; *
serve the Lord with gladness
and come before his presence with a song.*

*Be ye sure that the Lord he is God;
it is he that hath made us and not we ourselves; *
we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.*

*O go your way into his gates with thanksgiving
and into his courts with praise; *
be thankful unto him and speak good of his Name.*

*For the Lord is gracious;
his mercy is everlasting; *
and his truth endureth from generation to generation.*

In our psalm today, the psalmist is feeling tested by the Lord. Imagine how this psalm would have spoken to Abraham as he was being tested by the Lord.

“How long shall I have perplexity in my mind,
and grief in my heart, day after day?”

In this Psalm, the author uses the cry “How long” four times to emphasize the emotion, the despair that he is feeling in the face of an enemy. Is the enemy God or is there another enemy and God the salvation? Don’t we ask this same question when we are tested, or when we face an enemy? It matters not whether you know the psalms, the psalms know you.

I love the psalms. I love reading them in the Book of Common Prayer as I wait for a service to start, or from my Bible when I am doing my daily devotions.

I love that we keep our ancient and Holy song book alive by including the psalms as part of the liturgy - no matter what Episcopal service you are attending. Morning Prayer or Holy Eucharist, a funeral or a wedding, you will hear a psalm. Like the 23rd Psalm, often included as part of a funeral service, lives in many hearts,

The LORD is my shepherd; *

I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; *

he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul; *

he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his

Name's sake.

I encourage you to read the psalms. You can use the psalm each week for your personal Bible study or just pray that psalm every day for the week. I believe that this is a good way to get to know the psalms as the psalms know you. The Psalms are an ancient part of our worship service, and it is up to us to keep them fresh in our service today and for ever more.

And perhaps, the psalms will inspire you to write your own psalm as they inspired me to write a psalm for our Priest Elizabeth and our church.

“How long, O Lord, must our dear one suffer?

How long until we can be together again?

*How long must we depend on others to see us
through our joys and our pains?*

When will we know the answer, O Lord?

When will we know what the future holds?

Be with us O Lord as we await news and continue to pray.

*You are our stronghold. You have given us gifts of healing, service, prayer,
worship, hospitality, and wisdom.*

*Together the church and our dear one will prevail,
we will survive, we will thrive.*

*For those we love and you, our heavenly Father, are with us always
and for ever.”*

What starts with a sigh and ends with a song? A psalm. Amen.