

June 25 - When Your Back's Against the Wall
Psalm 30, Psalm 6, Psalm 126 (and other Psalms)

Psalm 6 – “I am weary with my moaning, every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. My eyes waste away because of grief; they grow weak because of all my foes.”

With David, there are times we feel hopeless. we feel in despair
With David, How long O Lord?

Then we may cry even louder: Where is God?

Last Monday evening the Pewamo-Westphalia school board met. They were looking forward to talking with their new school superintendent, George Heckman. Heckman had been a beloved school principal; moving to the superintendent's position just made sense. The meeting began but Heckman didn't arrive. This was very unusual! A few hours later, law enforcement officers found George and his son Grant, who had lived all 28 years of his life with cerebral palsy. Both George and Grant had been shot and had died. George's wound appeared to be self-inflicted. Now Mrs. Heckman and her two other children are, like David, in great despair.

What do we do when tragedy strikes? Joyce and her husband were looking forward to starting a family. But after a number of miscarriages their hopes had diminished.

What do I do when a daughter, who is not married, tells me she is pregnant? Or what do you do when you recognize a family member, it could even be a parent or an aunt or uncle or cousin as well as a son or daughter, has an opioid addiction? The recent AARP newspaper carried an article showing the faces of today's criminals. They don't "look like" criminals: they're older, female as well as male. They're otherwise "average" citizens. But they're selling drugs to finance their own opioid addiction.

What do you do when lightning strikes a tree near your house, inflicting so much damage it takes weeks of living without all the conveniences you're used to and large amounts of money to **1**

bring the house and life back to a semblance of normal? This has been Sigrid's experience since May 28.

There are times in our lives when we feel hopeless, in despair, all alone. We may have relatives and friends, but for whatever reason they aren't available to help:

they may have their own challenges that absorb all their time and compassion.

We've heard of compassion fatigue. There is a limit to how often and how much we can handle tragedy (think major hurricanes, famines, earthquakes. We just get tired.) Those close to us aren't available; sometimes they may judge us for what has happened. We feel ALL ALONE! Our backs are against the wall...

Like David we cry out, Are you there God? Is anyone there to help? Answer me God!

What happens when the crisis we face continues on and on?

What happens when we receive a diagnosis of a serious illness such as cancer? Miracles do happen, everyday. But for some reason this time you're not one of the recipients and so you face months or years of ongoing treatment, knowing any time the cancer could reappear.

What happens when the crisis involves one or more of your children? Nicole and Christian McDonald gave approval for the separation of their conjoined sons Jadon and Anias. That was eight months ago when the boys were 13 months old. The delicate surgery apparently has been successful, although the boys reverted to early infancy abilities, having to relearn to sit up, to track with their eyes. Mother Nicole visits everyday, making the 40-mile drive, one way, to spend time with the boys. Father Christian is busily renovating a house so the boys eventually can come home and get better acquainted with older brother Aza. Mother Nicole says, "It's like climbing a mountain, you get to the place you thought was the top only to realize you have another mile to go and you don't have the supplies for it." **2**

The CNN article noted, "She thinks back to a moment weeks earlier when she reached a breaking point..."

Again David cries out, this time in Psalm 86:

To you, O Lord, I cry all day long....
I'm one miserable wretch?

When we read both psalms, we see David assumes God is, God exists, even as David wonders why God isn't helping right now.

Psalm 86: Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me

Psalm 6: Turn, O Lord, save my life

So we need to take a side trip to ask....

What kind of God do we worship?

- ◆ In Psalm 6, David pleads, "O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger, or discipline me in your wrath."

This is one "explanation" of God's nature: an angry God who punishes us by making us ill, making us suffer. ---- For hundreds of years, this has been one description of God's nature. In the New Testament, the disciples see a blind man and ask Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or this man's parents?" Jesus answered: neither and spoke of the man's blindness as a way of demonstrating God's glory. John 9:2

--Is God so angry he chooses to punish an innocent baby born with cerebral palsy? Or innocent babies born sharing the top of their heads, making them one unit?

- ◆ Then there are those who describe God as controlling: everything that happens is planned and controlled by God. --Does this mean the drunk driver who drives the wrong way on the interstate, slams into a car killing the people in the other car is doing all of this because God intends for it to happen? Or did God plan the near-accident I had Saturday when a driver turned left right in front of me? We both slammed on our brakes and there was just enough space between the front of the other car and the curb for me to steer out of danger. I don't think God plans for us to have car accidents!

--Does God cause wars and intend for innocent children to be killed?

- ◆ One more description: Maybe we acknowledge God created this world, and humans, but we think God now is on vacation or just sitting in the stadium watching as all of us struggle on our own.

What is the nature of the God we worship? One portion of one Sunday morning message isn't adequate to answer this question. For today, for me, the short answer is "God is love." As Christians, we believe this: Jesus, God's only son, died on the cross for each of us and then was raised from the dead. God's love is sacrificial love. So we shouldn't blame God for suffering, for our hopelessness and despair.

But still, there are times in our lives when we feel hopeless, in despair, all alone. And even though we have a spouse or adult children or other family members to lean on, we still feel all alone. Our backs are against the wall. What do we do? Where do we turn?

With David, we have to hope in the Lord. Because ultimately God is all we have. Psalm 30:1-5,11-12 – weeping lasts for a night but joy comes in the morning

Sometimes, God is all we have. And God is enough.
It Is Well (With My Soul)

Horatio and Anna Spafford were raising their children in Chicago. It was 1873. The family planned a voyage to Europe, but Horatio had to remain behind for a business emergency. Anna and their four daughters sailed as scheduled. Horatio promised to follow on a later voyage. As the ship sailed across the Atlantic Ocean, it was struck by another ship. Within minutes, the ship sank, taking all 226 passengers into the water. Anna was one of the few passengers rescued; all four daughters were lost. Horatio immediately boarded the next ship to sail. About four days out, the captain called Horatio up on deck and 4

told him they were sailing over the area in which his four daughters were lost. From that tragedy came these words: When peace like a river attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll, Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul. The Spafford family was no stranger to tragedy: their son had died of pneumonia two years before this tragedy. Their real estate investment business was lost in the great Chicago fire. And yet Horatio Spafford could write, It is well, it is well with my soul.

Psalm 30

You, O Lord, turned my wailing into dancing
You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy
God is present with us; God loves us; God can restore us

And an interesting part of this is that as we are experiencing God's restoration—in whatever form that takes—we may be called upon to help another experiencing a similar life crisis.

Joyce, the woman who suffered a number of miscarriages, found her experience of loss was helpful to other women experiencing a miscarriage.

My experience with the challenges my daughter confronted as a teenager and as a young adult has helped me understand other parents as they struggle to be a loving parent, even when their children don't make wise decisions.

Lorraine had finally connected with a man who seemed to be all she could want in a husband, even though all the communication had been by email, text, telephone calls. Finally they agreed to meet in his hometown, Toronto. Lorraine drove there from New York City, a five-hour drive. Together, face-to-face, they agreed this relationship had a future. But that afternoon Yves complained of a headache. After dinner, he said his headache was worse. He collapsed and was rushed to the local hospital. The next morning, after his family arrived and said their good-byes, Yves was taken off life support. He had suffered irreversible brain damage from a brain aneurysm. Lorraine went from hope for a developing relationship to despair in a matter of 24 hours. As she made that long drive back 5

home, Lorraine stopped at a diner to eat. Still lost in despair, deciding what to eat was just such a difficult decision. She thought she owed the server an explanation: my very special friend just died, it was a brain aneurysm. The server seemed to be avoiding her for a while after that. And then the server returned, and said, "My husband passed away two years ago; it was a brain aneurysm." Coincidence? I don't think so: I believe God brought together two people who were experiencing the same type of despair and hopelessness. Each could understand what the other was feeling. Each could give words of encouragement, real encouragement coming out of that despair, to the other.

Zeke and Mary have mentioned the sense of family they experience each time they go to Mayo. A family of fellow travelers on the road to restored health and/or on the road to acceptance of their health challenges. We too may be called upon to share words of encouragement to those in crises similar to our own.

God will call us,

- ◆ perhaps while we are still in despair and hopelessness,
- ◆ perhaps as we are coming out of our despair or even
- ◆ perhaps at a time after we have experienced some type of restoration.

God will call us to voice God's hope and God's love to another experiencing a similar life crisis. And as God's love brings restoration to the other, God's love is restoring us. Our weeping turns to joy.

Psalm 126 is one of the songs of ascents. Pilgrims on their way to worship in the temple at Jerusalem sang as they walked.

"When the Lord restored our fortunes" –

God has worked good in our/my lives/life before now—we just need to recognize and acknowledge God's work. Last Tuesday's Bible study included this question: When have you experienced God's grace apart from a time of asking for God's grace? Remember the flip pad distributed at a previous worship 6

service? Where have we seen God at work? Do you still look for God at work?– for God’s presence each day?

When we can see God at work, sense God’s presence we are reminded we have reason to trust, to believe, to have hope. When our backs are against the wall, we can sing, as the pilgrims did, “Restore our fortunes O Lord.”

We have God’s promise: those who sow with tears will reap with joy. We can sow seeds of faith and hope even as we cry in despair. We can sow seeds of faith and hope by acting as if God is present, as if God is working. Even when, like David, we wonder where God is.

And we will reap with shouts of joy – in time. From seeds to stalks of grain takes time. Each trip I make downstate, I am reminded that growth takes time. It isn’t instant, like the Chia pets of a few years ago. The brown fields in which winter wheat was planted so many months ago became carpets of green. Then the green stalks grew taller and heads of grain became visible. Now the stalks of grain are green gold. Soon they will be golden and ripe for harvest.

Or closer to home, several weeks ago the cherry trees blossomed as spring came. The trees leafed out, fruit set on. Cherries grew and are ripening. Weeks between blossoms and sweet, ripe cherries ready to eat. Growth takes time. From sowing in tears to reaping with shouts of joy takes time.

When our backs are against the wall, when we feel hopeless and in despair, God hasn’t abandoned us. God may be all we have. In those times we are called upon to remember how God has blessed us in our past. We can trust in a loving God.

Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
May we who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,
come home with shouts of joy, carrying our sheaves.
God is always present. We have that promise....