

**Altavista Presbyterian Church
Rev. Eduardo Soto, Jr.**

**“Speaking With God:
Prayers of Supplication”
I Corinthians 15:20-28
Psalm 42:1-11**

**Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
February 17, 2019**

I Corinthians 15:20-28

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

Psalm 42

To the choirmaster. A Maskil of the Sons of Korah.

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?” These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival.

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me. By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life. I say to God, my rock: “Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?”

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

“Speaking With God: Prayers of Supplication”

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. Friends, this is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

One of the most beautiful things about the Psalms is their raw emotions. At the beginning of this series, I said that when we pray, we are speaking with God. And we speak to God for different reasons. But because of who he is—almighty, all-knowing, and holy—we must have a posture of humility when we approach him in prayer. Nevertheless, that does not mean we cannot be open with God. The truth is, he knows our hearts. He knows our desires. And, most importantly, he knows our suffering. This is one of the most inspiring truths of Christianity. No other religion has

a god who would condescend to our level, incarnate himself in a child, grow up to be a simple carpenter, and then die a rebel's death. Buddha didn't do that. Mohammed didn't do that. Krishna didn't do that. We worship a God who knows our suffering.

Because of this, I fully believe God wants us to bear our emotions toward him. He's a big God. Nothing we say in humble prayer can hurt him. We know this because we can look to the Psalms and hear the suffering of God's people. One of the greatest genres of the Psalms are the laments. These are the cries of the Israelites, many of them written while in exile. The 137th Psalm is particularly emotion. "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion... How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign Land?" asks the Psalmist. He closes with chilling and raw emotion, "O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us! Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!"

The emotion behind the 137th Psalm is clearly anger. The psalmist has been uprooted and subjugated under a foreign power. He likely witnessed the destruction of his home and perhaps the murder of his own kin. He is angry at the world; at the Babylonians. And yet, even in the midst of this emotive prayer, he retains a posture of humility. While he uses very graphic imagery of the murder of children, and while he wishes that upon the Babylonians, notice that he doesn't say "let me at 'em!" Nor does he ask God to exact vengeance on his behalf. Rather, it's as if he said to God, "Lord, if it is your will that one day a nation shall rise up against Babylon, my anger and hurt is still so deep that I will bless that nation with my lips." The psalmist never raises himself above God, but he also doesn't hold back his emotions.

When we pray prayers of supplication, that is prayers of entreaty and desire, God invites us to pray with the fullest range of our emotions. I chose the 42nd Psalm for our study this morning because I love the rich imagery and the emotions that, I think, all of us, at one point or another, have felt. "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God." This should be our every desire. Every moment of every day should be filled with an endless yearning for God. Much of society today tells us we should desire things that are not of God or yearn for things before God. They say we should be longing for autonomy, individuality, and power over and against God and religion. They say we should seek after change, after happiness, after success *before* seeking after God. My friends, this ought not to be so.

We must thirst for God as if we are in the middle of a desert; for indeed we are. Truly, we are in a desert of wickedness. We may find pockets of piety and oases of orthodoxy, but the reality is, this whole world is so far removed from God that it took God, himself, to enter into this time and space in order to give a Guide and Shepherd. I believe the psalmist, too, felt this desert about him. He says in verse three, "My tears have been my food day and night..." So parched was he for righteousness that he could not be fed but by his own tears of lamentation. "They say to me all the day long," he cries, "Where is your God?" The "they" here are those who freely and willingly inhabit the desert of iniquity. They have grown a cynicism for the Lord and a contempt for his people. They look upon the psalmist in his lamentation, in his grief, wandering in this desert, seeking after a God, whom they've rejected, and they chide and taunt him. "Where is your God, now? He's left you here to die. He does not love you. He cares not for your situation."

If we're honest with ourselves, most of the time we don't need external persons chiding us in this way. More often than we care to admit, we look out upon the world and these questions well up within us. We see a world torn apart by political conflicts. We see our nation berating our fellow Americans. As a country, we've lost our sense of civility. We no longer challenge ideologies, rather we attack a person's character and quickly withdraw under the banner of prejudice when our own ideologies are challenged. The Christian looks out upon this society and she laments within herself, "Where is God in all of this?"

The psalmist's prayer finds its height in this chorus: "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?" This is the deepest moment of sorrow. Our psalmist's spirit is broken. He's been worn down by the castigations of his enemies. He's been berated, lambasted, and censured. It's at moments like these when the devil starts celebrating. Satan loves it when the church is full of hopeless Christians. Christians whose soul is cast down and who struggle to find the Lord. It's in moments like these when we are most vulnerable. In these fragile states, it is easy for us to fall into contempt for God. You see, there's a fine line between lament and blaspheme. And in those moments of brokenness, our enemy attempts to tip us over to join him in unrighteousness.

Our challenge as believers, but one we must overcome, is remembering that the psalmist's chorus has two parts. While he recognizes and laments his brokenness, in the same breath, he reminds himself to "hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God." In a surprising turn, he repeats that his soul is cast down within him, but this time he adds, "therefore I remember you." *Because I am broken, I can remember you, O God.* The fact that the devil wants us on our knees should remind us of the awesome power of that posture. When the enemy gets us to the point where our knees hit the ground, we must remember that we are in a perfect position to pray.

This was the situation in Psalm 42. The psalmist has been lost in the wilderness, surrounded by wickedness and accosted by iniquity. He's had such a hard time seeing anything good in the world that, finally, the enemy breaks his spirit. In that brokenness he cries to God. And in that moment, when he *remembered* to cry out to God, he also remembered that *there is a God* to cry out to. Remember, Church, that's the thing that makes Christianity unique. We have a God whom we can cry out to, because he knows our suffering. Sometimes it feels like the whole sea is rushing over us. Sometimes it feels like we are so far removed from God. But deep within our heart of hearts, we know that his steadfast love is there. Still, we sometimes find ourselves asking "Why have you forgotten me, God?"

Our Psalm today ends with a repeat of the chorus, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God." I imagine the psalmist saying this one of two ways. Perhaps he's going deeper into despair: "Why, why are you cast down, O my soul?" There are times when we must allow our prayers to simply reverberate. Our prayers don't always have to end on a happy or positive note. But they must end as they began: with God. God must be the alpha and omega of our prayers. It is, after all, to him we are praying. When we humbly submit our emotions, even our frustrations, to God, we can trust in his steadfastness and we can hope in his receiving our prayer.

But I like to read this chorus another way. The 43rd Psalm is a continuation of the 42nd. We know this because it, too, contains a repeat of this chorus. Only this time, we see the psalmist transitioning. I know we didn't read it this morning, but if you want to, I'd encourage you to turn to Psalm 43. When I read verse eleven of Psalm 42, I read it as a command given by the psalmist to himself. "*Why* are you cast down, O my soul, and *why* are you in turmoil within me? *Hope in God*; for I shall again praise him, *my salvation and my God.*" It's as if he said, "There's no reason for me to be cast down. The devil is a liar, I am not broken. Indeed, the truth of God is in my very lament. Turn, soul, and look to the God of my salvation."

That turning point is when he recognizes the power God has over our adversary. The victory over Satan was won on Calvary. The brokenness of our spirit is only a lie to torment us. This is why the psalmist says in 43:1 "Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people, from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me!" The desert of unrighteousness and injustice may seem vast and overwhelming. We may, like the psalmist, perceive that we are rejected by God. Each of us, at some point, must come to the realization that this perception is actually a misconception. God does not reject his children. God's chosen are not left to dangle and fend unaided. Indeed, through prayer, we come to realize that there is no need to "go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy." All the work of the devil is futile. It may be painful in the present, it may bring us anxiety, despair, and even death; but the truth that we can and should latch onto is that Satan's work will come to an end. But God's work is eternal and eternally good.

And so we, like the psalmist, can come to God in our despair and lamentation, and grow. We are transformed through our prayers. We move from wanting to curl up and fade into darkness to seeking after God's light and going to his altar with joyfulness and praise. Why? Because God is *our* God. Because of Christ's sacrifice and the salvation he provides, we are adopted sons and daughters of the Father, and he is our God. "O God, *my* God." When the adopted children of God turn to him and see his shining face guiding us, loving us, and dwelling with us, we can say, with the psalmist, "*Why* were you cast down, my Soul; *why* were you in turmoil? *Hope in God*; for I *shall again praise him*, my salvation and *my* God."

Let us pray. God of our salvation, you came to us, incarnate in Jesus Christ, to save your lost children. As the sheep who wanders from the herd is scared and afraid, so, too, are we when we wander from your church. As we come to you in prayer, come to us, Good Shepherd, and comfort us with your rod and your staff. In our deepest, darkest moments, may we never forget to call on your name. And when we do, may we be reminded of your steadfast love and hope in you, our Salvation and our God. Amen.