

“A Prayer for All People”
6-20-2010 Calvary sermon by Brian Henderson

Text: Psalm 42

I love reading the psalms because they have a timeless way of resonating with the dynamics, complexities and emotions of reality—of everyday life and faith.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if everything in life went the way we'd want it to be? or... Wouldn't it be great if life as we knew it was without problems...without issues...without the stuff and dynamics that often make life the challenge it is?

Life without sickness or disease...life without family drama...life with school...but without all the reading assignments and papers that can make school stressful...

Life without worry...without hurt feelings...without lack of finances...without unemployment...without fear...without war...without blue states and red states...without oil spills and earthquakes and tornadoes and catastrophes of global proportions...

Wouldn't life be wonderful if it didn't have all the “stuff” that often makes it the challenge it is? I don't know...I don't know if it would be wonderful...because I've never known life any other way than the way it is...and this is true for all of us...isn't it?

Based off of Erik Erikson's 8-stages of psychosocial or human development, someone once described the stages of life as being: *spills, drills, thrills, bills, ills, pills, wills*—it's bit depressing, isn't it...but accurate too.

If you think about it...even the classic film...*It's a Wonderful Life* reminds us as viewers that there is much about life that isn't wonderful too.

So...we live life—experiencing its high tides and low tides—its ups and downs—its mountain tops and valleys—its comedies and tragedies—we experience life with all of our strengths and weaknesses.

Sometimes we live life well with a sense of balance and perspective—and at other times we struggle for balance and perspective—we can feel *hopeful* and we can feel *hopeless*.

This is what Psalm 42 which Bruce has read for us so well is about.

Again, the psalms and their psalmists resonate in a timeless way with the dynamics, complexities and emotions of reality—of everyday life and faith.

We don't know for sure what realities the writer here in Psalm 42 faced. But we know this psalmist faced them. Some scholars suggest that perhaps the psalmist developed some illness or disease that ostracized her from family and friends—from society. And in the psalmist's

culture...illness and disease could have been interpreted as divine disfavor.

So it may be no wonder that folk around this psalmist were asking over and over, “Where is your God?” *If your god had favor upon you...you wouldn't be sick and your god wouldn't have abandoned you.* “Where is your God?”

It's fair to say that at one level this psalmist struggled, really struggled...even struggled to have hope...for he wrote, “My tears have been my food day and night...”

My tears have been my food day and night.

Sometimes I wonder if within our culture and context—even within the life of the Church—if we forget that part of our human reality and existence means we will struggle.

We like to look strong...we like to look brave...we want everything to be wonderful...we don't want others to know the realities we face...the fears and uncertainties we have...

The psalmists of old weren't afraid to convey their struggles...

A greater struggle for us though may be to allow others around us to express their questions, their fears, their struggles without us judging them or trying to fix things for them...

Part of being, I believe, even being a Christ-like community that experiences and shares God's love, means creating sacred and safe places for all of us as people to come and be who we are and to feel safe in sharing how we are...so that together we can provide mutual encouragement and support for our journeys of life and faith.

The psalmist here in our text remembers such places when she or he recounts with fondness their participation in the procession to the house of God...to the temple in Jerusalem.

As if to say...when faith communities—when we as a Christian community—create space for folk to belong, we have the opportunity to offer hope and meaning and life when hope and meaning and life are needed most.

Perhaps life is wonderful...when we allow the extremes of life to coexist—when we recognize that life brings tides of joy and tides of struggle—when we are brave enough to admit the struggles we have—when we're caring and compassionate enough to listen to others' struggles—and I mean genuinely listen without being quick to write them off or to dismiss them as being a "problem" which needs to be quickly solved...

Perhaps life is wonderful when through life's realities—the hope-filled ones as well as the hope-less ones—we, following the lead of this psalmist, continue to cry out for...and seek after always...God...

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.

This is a prayer for everyone. Will it be yours today?

And lest we forget...Jesus lived this prayer through his life. And even Jesus struggled like this psalmist...hanging on the cross in Mark's gospel...Jesus' final question...his final words cried out: "My God, my God...why have you forsaken me?"

Perhaps you're finding yourself crying such a prayer today? Perhaps you're not. If you are...like Jesus...like the psalmist...keep seeking and you will find hope.

And if you're not...if you're at a place where life is stable and maybe even strong...will you be willing to be a person...a sacred space to whom others can turn to share their struggles?

So that just maybe through your love and compassion...they may find the hope and courage necessary to keep on keeping on.

So be it, I pray. Amen.