

When The Floods Rise©

Matthew 7:7-11; Psalm 69:1-16

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Walter Bruggeman – scholar and teacher of the Old Testament says that the psalms can be broken down into three categories:

Psalms of Orientation: where everything is good and going as it should be.

Psalms of Disorientation: Where life is coming apart; enemies are lurking on the sidelines or have already struck and taken captives; or, there is anger or death and grief.

Psalms of Reorientation: Where life is better again, or at least is beginning to look up, but the pain and grief of the past is still very present – still very much in the immediate memory.

This morning's psalm is one of "disorientation." We don't know just who the enemies are, or just exactly why they are making the psalmist's life miserable, although we do have some hints about what's going on.

Apparently, the psalmist is being mocked and laughed at and treated cruelly, even by his own family. He writes ⁸ I have become a stranger to my kindred, an alien to my mother's children. (Which is another

way of saying, “My own siblings consider me the ‘black sheep’ of the family.”

And it appears the psalmist kind of puts the blame on God because it is his loyalty and faithfulness to God that is causing the scorn and the shame by others.

But this sounds like it is much more than just family and friends making fun of someone’s faith beliefs. I don’t think it is a lighthearted tease that we might occasionally get here today about being Presbyterian or even being a Christian.

The psalms are full of emotions and are full of images that describe, metaphorically, how we humans feel. A while back, during Lent, I preached on Psalm 137 that starts with this wonderful image: “By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept. We hung our harps in the willow trees.”

That was written by someone who had experienced recently the pain of being an exile in a foreign land – an exile who, along with other

Israelites were being mocked by their captors and pressed to sing their worship songs as they once did in the temple in Jerusalem – that sacred place that was now burned to the ground.

Or, like Psalm 1 that uses the image of a tree, planted and nourished by the river – flourishing and green and bearing fruit.

Today's psalm also uses an image. It is one we've seen a lot recently in the news as Texas, Arkansas and Oklahoma have been experiencing the chaos of floods that sweep through the land and take homes and lives as it rushes through.

The psalmist says he is up to his neck in floodwaters. Even if he can touch bottom, it is a sinking mire. The Message translation says it this way: *“God, God, save me! I’m in over my head, Quicksand under me, swamp water over me; I’m going down for the third time.”*

It goes on to say (from the Message):

“I’m hoarse from calling for help, Bleary-eyed from searching the sky for God. ⁴ I’ve got more enemies than hairs on my head; Sneaks and liars are out to knife me in the back.”

No, this is not just a run of the mill, ordinary day kind of tease. This is a cry for help; this is someone who is feeling desperate, who is overwhelmed with fear and anxiety. These are not little hecklers after him; this is serious stuff. The psalmist is being persecuted for his faithfulness to God in a place where he is surrounded by enemies of God.

I can't help but think of Jesus when I read this psalm. For he too, was treated with scorn and hatred and was finally killed by his enemies. Jesus too, was up to his neck in floodwaters, wasn't he?

A great thing about the psalms is that those human emotions are still very real to us. Most of us have had some time in our life when life seems to be disoriented – things are falling apart. We know what it feels like to be up to our necks in floodwaters, feeling like the waters will overwhelm us and sweep us away.

Maybe it was the loss of a job and not being able, no matter how hard you've searched, to find work. The bills are piling up and the creditors are calling and threatening.

Or, perhaps there was a time when you were very ill (or a loved one was ill) and you were helpless in knowing what to do and how things could ever be right again. You might know what it is to be *hoarse from calling for help, Bleary-eyed from searching the sky for God.*

There are so many situations in life that can cause this feeling of despair that surely most all of us have known that experience. We don't have to have literal enemies to feel trapped as if the world is out to get us.

But, that is where our gospel reading can be so reassuring. This psalm is prayer – a cry to God for help. And Jesus says, “I'm right here, here for you.

“Knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”

God hears our prayers and answers. Of course, we don't always get the answer as fast as we want. And it may not be that clear for us to know the answer at first. In fact, the answer may not be what we were hoping for.

But we can trust that God, who is so much wiser, so much more perfect than we could ever be knows what we need. God hears our cry and is here with us to comfort and to guide and to redeem; to give us life; to save us.

In fact, Jesus – God incarnate – is the answer to so many of those cries. Jesus, who knows suffering and shame; who knows what it is to be hunted by enemies; Jesus the healer, the Redeemer, the Savior – God’s own Son – He is an answer to prayer, even as he is with us to give reassurance and comfort and hope through His Holy Spirit.

Take heart all you who are feeling that the floodwaters are up to your neck, for God says through Isaiah (in chapter 43):

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.

For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
... you are precious in my sight,
and honored, and I love you ...,

Do not fear, for I am with you.”

Thanks be to God for the psalms that speak our language, even today. Thanks be to God for His love and redemption, given to us in His Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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