

The Passion of the Psalms: Trust

May 25, 2008

Year A: Second Sunday after Pentecost

Camp Norwesca; near Chadron, Nebraska
Chadron United Methodist Church; Chadron, Nebraska

Today begins a new sermon series that will take us through the summer months. I will be walking us through the Psalms – a text that I don't do a lot of preaching from which is strange since these passages are packed full of emotion, of passion, of feeling. They run the gambit of the entire human experience. Some are joyful, others sad, some are full of anger, and others are just thankful. In fact, the Psalms are the earliest form of pastoral counseling that we know of. Most scholars believe that when an individual came into the Temple or a synagogue they would visit the leader of the congregation – either a rabbi or a cantor (a cantor would be the equivalent of what we would call a Music Minister). This individual would tell this leader their issues: celebration of the birth of a newborn baby, grief over the loss of a loved one, anger that God didn't look favorably on them or on Israel, and so on. The leader would then choose a Psalm most fitting their circumstance. If he was a cantor then he would sing it otherwise the Psalm would just be read. And when the leader would reach the part called "*selah*" they would provide a mini-sermon or a prayer specific to that person's situation. Today this Psalm would be chosen if you needed to hear about TRUST.

Pepe Rodriguez, one of the most notorious bank robbers in the early settling of the West, lived just across the border in Mexico. He regularly crept into Texas towns to rob banks, returning to Mexico before the Texas Rangers could catch him.

The frustrated lawmen were so embarrassed by this that they illegally crossed the border into Mexico. Eventually, they cornered Pepe in a Mexican bar that he frequented. Unfortunately, Pepe couldn't speak any English, so the lawmen asked the bartender to translate for them.

The bartender explained to Pepe who these men were, and Pepe began to shake with fear. The Texas Rangers, with their guns drawn, told the bartender to ask Pepe where he had hidden all the money he had stolen from the Texas banks. "Tell him that if he doesn't tell us where the money is right now, we're going to shoot him dead on the spot!"

The bartender translated all this for Pepe. Immediately, Pepe explained in Spanish that the money was hidden in the town well. They could find the money by counting down seventeen stones from the handle, and behind the seventeenth stone was all the loot he had stolen.

The bartender then turned to the Rangers and said in English, "Pepe is a very brave man. He says that you are a bunch of stinking pigs, and he is not afraid to die!"¹

For our reading today please turn to Hymn #573 (Norwesca) / #787
(sanctuary)

[Psalm 62:5-12 \(NRSV\)](#)

For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. ⁶He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. ⁷On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.

⁸Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.

Selah

⁹Those of low estate are but a breath, those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath. ¹⁰Put no confidence in extortion, and set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them.

¹¹Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God, ¹²and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord. For you repay to all according to their work.

Now this passage isn't about any old trust. It does not describe the trust one may get from a mortgage company, especially one who tells a new home buyer, "trust me! You can be in a new home tomorrow. Nothing down. Just open an Adjustable Rate Mortgage with low payments, sell that house in two years, buy another home, and make a huge profit."

This is not the kind of trust that we put with those running for political office. For in reality – anyone who serves in the public sector knows that one can not keep every single promise.

This is not the kind of trust we put in a get-rich-quick scheme. One does not make a lot of money, quickly selling vitamins, homes that have taxes owed on them, or a pyramid scheme.

Now you may be thinking to yourselves – mortgage bankers, politicians, fly-by-night salesmen - those are obvious. That kind of trust is conditional. But what about those we are really counting on. Is that the kind of trust referred to here in the Psalms?

⁹Those of low estate are but a breath, those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath.

No! This is not the kind of trust that comes from a neighbor. No matter how good their intentions, they may not always be able to come through for us.

This is not the kind of trust that may even come from a parent. You make a promise to your child to be there for their game, but something comes up at work and you just can't make it. Or you promise to get them for Christmas that toy they really want, but you don't have the money or when you get to the store it

¹ Wayne Rice. *Hot Illustrations for Youth Talks: 100 attention-getting stories, parables, & anecdotes.* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: ZondervanPublishingHouse, 1993). 163.

is sold out. Or you promise to fulfill those wedding vows but unfortunately death or simple broken dreams get in the way.

And this is not the kind of trust we can put in ourselves. My first sermon of this year was about New Year's Resolutions. How many of us are still fulfilling that promise?

Folks, these are the times when we need to turn to this Psalm. For all the times we put our trust in money, in power, in getting rich quick, in friendships, etc. We all know we have been let down, we've gotten frustrated, we've been demoralized, and we wonder – is there anything, anyone we can really trust.

For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. ⁶He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. ⁷On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.

⁸Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.

Jeanette Strong who is children's author often writes about her experiences as a mother. In one of her works she writes about relating parenting to her relationship with God. She says,

When my son was a toddler, washing his hair was always a problem. He would sit in the bathtub while I put shampoo on his hair. Then, when I poured on the water to make a lather, he would tip his head down so that the shampoo ran into his eyes, causing pain and tears. I explained that if he just looked straight up at me, he could avoid getting the shampoo in his face. He would agree; then, as soon as I started to rinse his hair, his fear would overcome his trust, and he would look down again. Naturally the shampoo would run into his face again, and there would be more tears.

During one of our sessions, while I was trying to convince him to lift up his head and trust me, I suddenly realized how this situation was like my relationship to God. I know God is my Father, and I'm sure God loves me. I believe that I trust Him, but sometimes, in a difficult situation, I panic and turn my eyes away from God. This never solves the problem; I just become more afraid, as the "shampoo" blinds me.

Even though my son knew I loved him, he had a hard time trusting me in a panicky situation. I knew I could protect him, but convincing him of that wasn't easy, especially when all he could see was water coming down. His lack of trust hurt me, but it hurt him more. He was the one who had to suffer the pain. I'm sure my lack of trust hurts God very much, but how much more does it hurt me?

Often in the Bible, we are told to lift up our head to God when problems come. He knows how to protect us if we remember to listen to Him. Now, when I find myself in a situation where it would be easy to panic, I picture my son sitting in the bathtub, looking up at me, learning to trust me. Then I ask God what I should do. Sometimes the answer may seem scary, but, one thing I'm sure of – He'll never pour shampoo in my face!²

² Jeanette Strong. *Illustrations Unlimited.*, James S. Hewett, ed. (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. 1988.) 479.

8 Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.

Folks, economically we've entered a tough time - record gas prices, food prices going through the roof, housing, etc. Folks, I know it is tough not be tempted by more credit, to go deeper in debt.

This weekend – Memorial Day weekend – a day to remember our loved ones, our service men and women, people who have given their lives for us – this can be a sad day. A weekend when we realize that our grief over those we lost is not in the past but is still right here. Their memories may be locked up here and even though we function without them, it still hurts.

Or maybe we are just having trouble with the concept of trust. We remember a time when that word meant something. A time when we didn't have to worry about lawsuits, about written agreements, about trainings to ensure that our children are safe.

Or maybe we are having trouble with broken promises. Family members who don't carry through, friends who borrow something but never reciprocate the favor, workplaces with colleagues that you have learned not to share stories with or have questionable reliability skills.

Trust is difficult. In fact, we are just as guilty of one of these discretions. We have all let someone down, we have not fulfilled promises, we have said things that we knew at the time we could not live up to. These are the times when we need to turn to Psalm 62, when we need to renew our sense in some thing, when we need to trust some one, when everyone and everything has failed us and even when we've failed ourselves, this Psalm reminds us that trust is still alive, trust is still available. We can still trust in God, for God will always come through for us. Every time - God is there for us.

Martha Hickman is a wonderful writer, an individual that talks about the simple blessings of life. In one of her stories she talks about a time when her and her family all forgot about her mother's birthday. "I was about seven," she writes, "my sister a year older -- both of us probably too young to remember anyone's birthday but our own." Martha's brother wasn't yet two and so she figures that the blame lay squarely on her father.

This is how Martha Hickman describes the time of instant revelation: "What I do remember is that we were all sitting at the dining room table, part way through the evening meal, when my father suddenly clapped his hand over his mouth." "No!" he exclaimed, or, maybe, 'Judas Priest!' which is as close as he ever came to swearing. He looked up at my mother in terrible consternation."

"I looked at her, too." Martha said. She sat there at the other end of the table, with a kind of tender, wounded smile.

"I'm sorry, dear?" her father said and then, to the rest of the family, "It's Mother's birthday!" He got up from the table and went to her and kissed her. "I'm sorry, darling," he said again. And again he looked to the rest and said, "We'll get something for Mother tomorrow."

Martha nodded, but it would not do. Forgot her birthday! For a small child, birthdays and Christmases are certainly highlights of the year, but Christmas belongs to everyone. Your birthday is your own -- your first claim to

being alive! She grieved for her my mother, shocked at her father's forgetting. And Martha felt a bit guilty as well as if she had played a part in the complicity.

But in Martha's mind there was no exoneration for any of them. They had failed their mother. Birthdays should not have to wait. Martha Hickman went upstairs and scoured her treasures for a holdover gift.

She chose a small ceramic planter in the shape of an elephant -- yellow and cream, its shiny surface crackled. It had been sent to her during a serious illness; the plant had long since died, and she had kept the planter with her favorite things. Hastily she wrapped it in used and wrinkled tissue paper, brought it downstairs, and presented it to her mother.

Martha's mom exclaimed how lovely it was and gave her a hug, expressing gratitude for such a fine gift.

"I don't remember what we got her the next day," Martha writes -- whatever it was could not, in her mind, undo the damage. "But I remember the elephant vase," Martha Hickman says, "because my mother took it upstairs with her, put it on her bureau and it stayed there, lifted of course for dustings and cleanings, the rest of her life."

When Martha's mother died she reclaimed it and it is again in her possession, on a bookcase, reminding her of how, often inadvertently, we hurt those we love, and how, by the grace of God in human love, they forgive us -- so that it is often more than "all right." It is somehow sacred -- to the one who gives, and the one who receives.³

Folks, trust can be captured again when we turn this feeling, this passion back on to God. For all those times we've hurt someone else, for all those times we have failed ourselves, God is still there, forgiving us and renewing our sense of trust. This Psalm reminds us that God never fails us. When we need to hear a word of trust all we need to do is turn to God and be renewed again.

There is a book that I have been sharing with the residents up at Crest View. This book has reminded me of the specialness of these texts. The author, Judy Hoff lives on the plains of North Dakota. She re-interprets the Psalms based on her life in her book, *Psalms from the Heartland*. This one is called *Heal Me, God*.

O God, I can only pray at home.
I am not comfortable in our church.
When I look up and see him seated across from me,
I don't want this anger and hurt inside me.
It's over and done;
Our land is theirs now.
I come to my church
To hear the words and songs that will comfort me.
I leave upset
Because he was there.
So I read your word at home;
Your holy book is my friend.

³ Martha Whitmore Hickman. "The elephant vase." *Seth's Compiled List of Jokes & Illustrations, Part I*. 39.

I sing songs of praise and thanksgiving
As I go about my day.
In the evening, I pray for healing,
So I can again go to my church
And feel at home.⁴

When all else fails, when you can not trust anyone even yourselves, turn to God and be healed and learn to trust again. Amen.

⁴ Judy F. Hoff. *Psalms from the Heartland*. (self published. 1999.)