

## “Out of the Depths” (from Psalm 130)

Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord.

The picture painted in the Psalm today is the desperate cry from deep water. It's a lonely picture, scary and hopeless, far from the security of dry land. It's the same picture painted in Psalm 69: *“I have come into the **deep** waters; the floods engulf me.”* (v.2) Reading on, we uncover the Psalmist's predicament: *“Deliver me from those who hate me, from the **deep** waters.”* (v. 14) Behind the poetry of the deep water lies a deep relational conflict. When the prophet Ezekiel speaks of the depths threatening the seaside town of Tyre, it's about economic catastrophe: *“With your great wealth and your wares you enriched the kings of the earth. Now you are shattered by the sea in the **depths** of the waters; your wares and all your company have gone down with you.”* (Ezekiel 37:33-34)

The call out of the depths is a metaphor, perhaps *the* metaphor, of that place where things are so undone we cannot put them together again. Whether in relationships, or health, or economic circumstances, or our spiritual lives, we know that place – the depths.

Perhaps you have been there, or you are even today. Pride, or maybe fear, tells us that it's better simply to give up (and sink) or to give in to the present circumstance and float around (until our energy gives out and then we sink). Today in worship, we hear the truthful word we need: in humility and faithfulness, we call out for the help that can only come from God.

I still remember my first personal view from the depths. I was young, not even 10 years old, playing in the back of my parents' property near a dry well. The shaft was backfilled with debris from the well drilled to

replace it. It was probably stable, but my parents had told me many times to avoid it. However, that day I decided I would, yes, stand on top of the old well and jump up and down. Repeatedly.

Apparently, there were air pockets in the fill that collapsed as I jumped, and I suddenly found myself falling and looking up out of the well. I probably descended 5 or 6 feet. But knee-deep in the Virginia clay in a well all alone, I was in a dark place looking up at the small ring of light above me. In that moment, my focus narrowed upon just two questions: 1) "Will I sink any deeper?" and 2) "How will I get myself out of this?"

I thought maybe I could try to get myself out. This was the preferred approach, because maybe I could also sidestep the parental consequences that were sure to come. But I quickly understood that I would not be able to save myself. The well's concrete walls were slick with moisture and clay. I could slowly scabble up high enough to be able to get my fingertips over the edge. With my knuckles quickly turning white with a struggling boyish grip, that was as far as I could go. Eventually, I'd lose my grasp and fall back into the hole.

Looking up prompted me to look inward, too. I berated myself, asking how I could've been so stupid. I feared the consequences when my disobedience was finally discovered. If confronted, could I blame someone else for this (the well digger, maybe?). Could I tell the story in such a way to remove or at least reduce my personal culpability? Would I get out at all, or is this really the end for me?

What I don't remember doing is calling out. Perhaps I was too panicked, too embarrassed, too fearful. I don't know.

My next memory is seeing my father's face looking over the opening of the well. I could feel his arms grasp mine and his strength in drawing

me out. The look on his face was not one I was accustomed to seeing him wear. He was clearly worried and deeply flustered. “You scared me to death,” he gasped. It turns out my father had an eye on me through the window of his study on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of our house. While he worked, he would peer out to check on me. When he saw me – white knuckles gripping the edge of that well – he came running. I was never as alone as I thought I was. We never are.

Now when things settled down, you can be assured that we had a talk about safety and my disobedience. What I remember more, though, was how he would spend the next few hours shoveling more fill into the old well, covering it securely so that it would never happen again. I think about that differently now, my father coated in summertime sweat and mud, not to mention the general inconvenience of spending a weekend afternoon doing all that. What a price he paid for my disobedience!

Obviously, I never fell in a well again. I wish I could say that was the last time I found myself in the depths. But, as hard as it is to confess our need for help, I did not need to doubt that there would be help when I called. What he did assured me that he would respond when I called.

Today we hear a lament and confession from the depths. Psalm 130 also gives us a glimpse of how God views us in our depths: *“With you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.”* (v. 4)

Forgiveness is a powerful word, though it’s often misused and thrown away like a cheap, disposable dinner plate. But in worship today, we hold it lovingly, gently like a newborn child. We join God's faithful calling out to the One who makes a way from the depths to the security of true and everlasting love. It is the work only God can do to draw us close to God, reconcile the relationships so conflicted among us, and reorder our community life so charitably that everyone can live with

enough. We do not deserve, and don't always comprehend the power of forgiveness. It comes at great cost, in the life, death and resurrection of his only begotten Son. And yet that is how God chooses to be with us.

The way the prophet Isaiah tells it, God is the one *"...who made a road in the **depths** of the sea so that the redeemed might cross over."* (51:10) The Apostle Paul gives a hearty "Amen!" in his letter to the Romans, declaring, *"I am convinced...that neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (8:38-39)

And so for today, the call is not to be honest about your place in the depths, and simply give in. Instead, it is a call to give yourself over. You cannot wait until all is made right in you before serving God. Instead, trust your whole selves to God, even the parts you wish weren't there (as if you could wish them away). That is a privilege we have been given. That relationship comes as a free gift, through our Lord Jesus Christ. And God, in love, will continue to heal you, and grow you more and more into the likeness of Christ.

Do not give up on yourself or on this world. For God is not finished with either one yet. As the Psalmist tells us, *"Put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption."* (Psalm 130:7)

\*The **bolded** words indicate the same Hebrew original in the texts.