

A New Song©

Luke 17:11-19; Psalm 40:1-10

Dr. Sharlyn DeHaven Gates

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Our psalm of David this morning begins with the words
 I waited patiently for the Lord;
 he inclined to me and heard my cry.
 He drew me up from the desolate pit,
 out of the miry bog,
 and set my feet upon a rock,
 making my steps secure.
 He put a new song in my mouth,
 a song of praise to our God.
 Many will see and fear,
 and put their trust in the Lord.

Who among us have not had the experience of waiting? We wait for good news. We wait for a soldier to come home from war. We wait for war to end. We wait to see justice finally win. We wait for equality and oppression to stop. We wait for news that an illness is gone; that cancer is in remission.

Sometimes we even cry out “How long? How long must I wait and wait for an answer, or for results? How long, O Lord, must I endure this suffering?”

The psalmist writes that he waited patiently for the Lord, but so often we do not wait patiently. In fact one of the commentators I read this week, on Psalm 40, suggested that waiting patiently might have been misinterpreted. He suggested perhaps it should be translated as “I waited and waited and waited – and FINALLY the Lord answered me.”

Seriously, when we are in the midst of a crisis – are we patiently waiting? Or, are we more likely to be anxiously waiting? Of course, we really have no choice but to wait, but *how* are we waiting? I think it is very human of us to *try* to wait patiently, but it is also very human to struggle with the patient part.

Either way, the point here is that the Lord most definitely did hear the cries of the one who was, as he describes it, down in the “desolate pit and the miry bog.”

Has any one here ever been in that place; that pit that is slick and foggy and no matter how hard you’ve tried to climb out of it on your own, you simply could not get a grip?

It’s that place where you can’t see the light – you’re so far down. And you can’t think straight – your brain feels foggy. I think we might feel that way when in deep grief. Or when everything seems to be falling apart and we can’t find an answer; anxiety gets the best of us.

We feel that way sometimes when we are really, really afraid. We can't see ahead and know that things are going to be alright. Or, you work for years and years for justice, but it looks like it is hopeless.

I used to think that pit that the Scriptures talked about, was a place where you sat when you had sinned; when you felt you had done something so bad you would never be forgiven. And it certainly *could* be that. But I think it is any of those other life situations as well, don't you? If so, haven't we all been in that pit at sometime in our lives?

But, remember last week, when we talked about the psalm of trust – a psalm of reorientation – when things had been life-threatening terrible, but the psalmist had trusted that God would see him through the crisis – and in fact, did. Things were looking up again. It was the mature faith of someone who had experienced God's help before, who could trust in God again.

Some of us have had that longtime experience with our faith. In that case, we know we can wait patiently – as difficult as it is – because we have known God to be faithful and trustworthy before.

Some of us are just learning to trust in the Lord and we might not be able to wait as patiently. Of course, even the long time person of faith still can have those anxious moments. It's natural. It's normal. It's so human.

In this psalm we hear that God hears our cry's for help; pulls us out of our despair and gives us a new song to sing – a song of praise and thanksgiving to the one who is our savior.

And the psalmist proclaims "Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord." And that is one of the most important factors in our faith, isn't it – that others will see our trust, and our experience, and they too will learn to trust? We become a witness to God's good help.

I can't help but think, at this place, about the lepers who were healed by Jesus. Talk about waiting. That had to be one of the deepest pits in life, to have leprosy, to be an outcast from your community and your family ...

To be cast aside out into a colony where the only people you have communication with are those who look like you – skin decaying, noses falling off. You are looking at the worst case scenarios, but you know you it is as if you are looking in a mirror. Hopeless is what they must feel.

So here are these 10 whom Jesus healed, yet only one came back to give thanks. Only one was a witness to God's power and action in his life. He fell on his face and praised Jesus with gratitude and love.

But surely, even just that one witness had an impact on those around him!

Imagine the impact, had all 10 come back to give praise – to sing their new song of thanksgiving to Jesus!

The psalmist proclaims:
Sacrifice and offering you do not desire,
but you have given me an open ear.

It kind of reminds me of our response, when the Worship Leader says: “Hear the Word of the Lord.” We respond with enthusiasm (hopefully) “Our ears are open!”

In saying that, I hope we are telling God that we are willing and ready to have God give us an “open ear” – ears that can hear and understand what the Spirit of God is teaching us.

And David writes:

‘Here I am;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me.
I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart.’

So, this is a psalm of thanksgiving and trust. It is a psalm that hopefully speaks to us as we find ourselves in those waiting rooms of life – those places where we are unsure of the future; where we long to hear that everything will be alright.

We are called to put ourselves in that same place of trust; to trust in nothing else besides God. To believe in God’s faithfulness to God’s people and to know that even as we wait, even as the waiting may become a grueling experience; that God’s timing is perfect; that God works all things together for good. God teaches and helps us and loves us to the moon and back.

This is a psalm that calls us to dedicate our hearts and minds – our very lives – to God. We know we can do that only because of the steadfast trustworthy nature of our Lord.

If we haven’t yet experienced it, ourselves – just look at others around you. Someone here has been in that place before and is a witness to God’s faithfulness – a sure help in a time of trouble.

And for those who have experienced help, know that you are instrumental in helping others to be in that same place. It is in our praising, and telling others, that the faith gets passed down from generation to generation.

We sing the new song God has put in our mouths – a song of thanksgiving and praise!

Let us, then, the children of God – the faithful, here in this day – sing our new song to the Lord so others will hear it, and perhaps put their trust in the one we have dedicated our lives to – the one who is most trustworthy; the one who can always be counted on – Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Let us stand together and sing our song –

“Give thanks with a grateful heart
Give thanks to the Holy One
Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son.

And now let the weak say, "I am strong"
Let the poor say, "I am rich"
Because of what the Lord has done for us.

Give thanks!”

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(The words and music to "Give Thanks With A Grateful Heart" are by Henry Smith)