

I know I come across as the most patient person in the world. But those who know me well know I am anything but. Yes I am that person that will click a computer key multiple times because the first time it didn't respond instantaneously to me. While I won't take it out on the next customer service person I get, I hate waiting.

I remember a particularly difficult season of waiting. It's when we found out that Meg had a serious congenital heart condition known as hypoplastic left heart syndrome. The options were pretty dire. Do nothing (let her die), wait for a heart transplant with a survival rate of 80% (sold as the best option at the time in spite of a lifetime of anti-rejection meds and other major side effects) and go through a series of 3 risky heart surgeries with a survival rate of 20%. (No thank you) Our immediate response was, "no brainer, lets go the transplant route". We were living in Dayton, Ohio and the best transplant hospital in that area and actually the entire East Coast was in Pittsburgh. So that's where we went.

Since Dan, Meg's dad had the primary income job, I was the one to go with her. And in Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh we waited, and waited, and waited. While we waited there were happy moments. Moments to hold Meg, sing to Meg, change her diaper, see her smile and hear her first babbles. There were also the tough moments when she had infections, where normal IVs weren't working so she had to have a permanent one stitched into her leg.

Then there was the agony of waiting for the heart and this had a double edge. It would mean another family losing the life of their child for us to get a heart. One week, two weeks, three weeks, four weeks. Every weekday found me at the hospital for 8-10 hours a day. Every weekend found Dan coming into town our two other kids, Suzanne and Jonathan, toddlers. This let me could spend time with them and allowed Dan to spend time with Meg. Every single day we prayed for a heart to become available. What was going to happen? We knew we were in the best place possible, and not just because US News ranked them in the top 10 children's hospitals. We knew from our experience. So we remained hopeful

Like the writer of Psalm 130, I knew what it was like to have my whole being hoping and waiting. Hoping for the heart that would save our precious Meg. Hoping against hope for something that would save her. Waiting to return to life as it had been before being thrown into this hurricane.

In this 5<sup>th</sup> week of Lent, as we reflect on Psalm 130, what moments of waiting come into your memories. Moments of waiting with your whole being?

Let's close our eyes and imagine ourselves in a crowd of ancient pilgrims headed toward Jerusalem. Climbing that hill to celebrate a religious festival. Maybe Sukkot or the Feast of Booths. A festival for remembering Israel's time in the wilderness after their escape from Egypt. Sukkot is celebrated in the fall, so it is also a harvest festival.

Psalm 130 would just be one of those songs you would sing on that journey. It is a song of waiting in anticipation for the celebration waiting for you at the end. Our psalm today is one of fifteen known as the Songs of ascent. They are found in the latter part of the book of Psalms. They're called the "Songs of Ascent" because of their reference to Jerusalem and Zion. (Psst...Zion is another name for Jerusalem.) You've probably encountered this puzzle when you read that Jesus and the disciples went up from Galilee to Jerusalem, even though Jerusalem is down south of Galilee. Jerusalem's elevation led people to use that as a directional reference point. You went up to Jerusalem or down from there. Pilgrims would repeat these shorter psalms from memory or they'd sing them.

These "Songs of Ascent" included a variety of themes because of the diversity of pilgrim voices. There were individual and communal laments. There were hymns of thanksgiving and wisdom psalms. And there were royal psalms focusing on whichever king was in power at the time.

When Psalm 130 was read just a moment ago, did you notice the lament? Did you notice the insights about the psalmist's relationship with God?

As with the other psalms we've looked at, Psalm 130 follows a simple structure. Verses 1-2 offer words of petition to God. Verses 3-5 acknowledge "sins". The NRSV calls them iniquities. Nancy deClassie-Walford notes that the Hebrew word for iniquities "avonoth" appears 200 times in the Old Testament in reference to human sins. The root of avonoth means "to bend, curve, turn aside, or twist." So we are given a vivid image of iniquity as "an act, or mistake, which is not right or is unjust."

Verses 5-6 is where we find our description of expectant hoping and waiting. And in verses 7-8 we get a reminder of God's faithful love to the larger community.

For Psalm 130 we will look at 3 translations and 2 paraphrases of verses 5-6. Here we will find rich engagement in this sorrowing psalm.

Pamela Greenbergs, *The Complete Psalms*: I look for you, my soul looks for you wildly, I wait for your word of response. My soul longs for you more than the watchman at the gate longs for morning, more than the tired watchman at the gate longs for the first flicker of dawn.

NRSVUE: I wait for the Lord; my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

CEB: I hope, Lord. My whole being hopes, and I wait for God's promise. My whole being waits for my Lord – more than the night watch waits for morning; yes, more than the night watch waits for morning.

The Message: I pray to God – my life a prayer – and wait for what he'll say and do. My life's on the line before God, my Lord, waiting and watching till morning, waiting and watching till morning.

The Manhattan Psalter: The Lectio Divina of Sister Juanita Colon: I wait and wait, my soul throbs with expectation. I'm like a watcher scanning the horizon for the first light of dawn; no, more intent, more eager.

Did you see the different ways these versions describe waiting? Waiting for God's response. Waiting for God's promise. Waiting to see what God will say. What God will do. Waiting in God's word. Each indicates a faithful and expectant kind of waiting in the assurance that God will respond.

The writer of this Psalm compares the feeling of waiting for God to the sentinels who stood guard on the third watch (the night watch). This was a watch of waiting. Waiting for the light of day. Breathing easier when they knew they made it safely through another night. The poetic repetition of this phrase adds emphasis and urgency to the experience of this psalmist who waits.

In verse 7, the voice of the one who is heard in the psalm calls on those also making the pilgrimage. He instructs them to "wait for the lord". The Hebrew word used here is *yachal*. It is used here to invite pilgrims not only to wait but to hope, to expect something to happen.

This is a voice that reminds the pilgrims to wait and hope as they make their way to Jerusalem together. As they move closer to Jerusalem, their voices join together. They grow confident of the redeeming presence of God with them. The God who also waits for them. Always. Our God waits for us always! Say that with me.

Our psalm today is one of seven penitential or remorseful psalms. It's been used in liturgies during Lent since Medieval times. Sung by ancient pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem, it continues to be sung by modern-day pilgrims making their way in today's world. Psalm 130 reminds us of our ways, our wrongdoings, our sins, the record of our guilt that can and does separate us from God.

Church family. This is the last week of Lent. Next week we celebrate Palm Sunday, which is our entrance into Holy Week. Can we join these ancient pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. Can we consider the ways our words and actions contribute to the avonoth of bending, turning aside, or twisting what we know to be right, while also declaring our longing and confidence as we wait for God's steady love to meet us on the path? As Nancy deClaisse-Walford suggests. This Psalm is an invitation to God's faithful people, "who embrace God's steadfast love (there's that word again), to help turn the tide of our world's and our own selfish iniquity – our self-seeking turning and twisting."

For pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem and for us today, we wait and we hope, believing that "God indeed can redeem us from all of our 'iniquities' – our twisted ideas of what is right and wrong, of what is just and unjust."

In spite of our bending, twisting, and turning aside, this Psalm invites us to give thanks for God's forgiveness and redeeming love. As Pamela Greenberg says in describing God's presence...it is a "storehouse of kindness." Thanks be to God for that abundant love and patience in waiting for us to turn back to God's holy path.

Our waiting for a transplant led to an unexpected outcome. We went to Pittsburgh thinking a transplant was the best answer. We learned as we spent time at Pittsburgh that the surgical route had better outcomes than we were told. We became more confident in the surgeries, but felt we needed to commit to a transplant if possible. We continued to wait, and wait, and wait. Then we got to a decision day. We could continue to wait, but Meg would become less and less a candidate for the surgeries. So we leaned into God's steadfast love and changed course. We switched to the surgery route. Meg fought through every surgery and as you can see, she is with us today. She is our beautiful miracle garden.

Where are my gardeners out there? I had to be honest with Ron and Pauline from Dig-It Gardening yesterday at the bunny car hop. They asked if I wanted to garden. I had to tell them that I just do not have time for gardening, even though I love it. But I found a new spiritual

practice that I think I can commit to. Starting seeds as a Lenten spiritual practice. If you are a gardener, I hope you will join me. If you aren't sure that you can be a gardener, maybe give it a try anyway?

I am going to take sunflower seeds and start them in pots. I will share updates and photographs along the way. When they sprout and get bigger, I will transplant them in my yard. I'll need to wait for them to sprout. I'll need to wait for them to grow. Now this is going to be a test of my patience. I'll need to wait for them to bloom. Remember I don't have patiences. But it will require, as Eugene Peterson said in the Message, "waiting and watching...waiting and watching." Sister Juanita Colon also says it well. "I wait and wait, my soul throbs with expectation." Who will join me in this Lenten practice? Who will send pictures and updates of their efforts?

Waiting is hard. It is not prized in our culture. But this Psalm reminds us that waiting is an act of hope. Waiting is a way of being present with the expectant anticipation of God's redemptive and immanent life. And that's something that is always with us and waiting to emerge. Again and again and again.