

My Soul in Silence Waits

With Quarantine Worship, we have been using only one reading each week and it is that reading on which I have been preaching. Most weeks, I choose the Gospel, often the Hebrew Scripture, and occasionally the Epistle. However, the Psalm in this week's readings is a part of my favourite psalm. Psalm 62. And as we're only using one reading, I decided to use the entire psalm.

It is a Psalm about waiting, it's about trust, and it's about hope. I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm not all that great at waiting. I can wait for an hour, a day, a week or even a month, and I can do that without complaint...well, without a lot of complaint.

Psalm 62 is about waiting...for God. It talks about waiting for God instead of anyone else, instead of any human. There are times in my life when I have felt let down by people. Some I shouldn't have trusted in the first place, others I trusted implicitly and was hurt. The times when I have felt hurt or abandoned by God, turned out to be times when **I turned away** -- not God.

The Psalm begins,

“For God alone my soul waits in silence;
from him comes my salvation.
He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall never be shaken.” (Psalm 62, NRSV)

Aside from the gendered language, I really like this psalm. I don't think God has a gender, I think God is too big for a gender or even a body. With faith in the Divine, I have shelter and strong support. I will live in a place that is hurricane, flood and storm-proof. I won't have to depend on anyone, or anything, but God.

It is difficult for me to ask for help. Most times, I would rather soak in a bathtub filled with sharpened scissors than ask for help. And yet, I am beginning to ask for help when I need it. I have never hesitated in asking God for help. It is God who usually directs me to where I can get the help I need - to the person I should speak to who can provide the best help.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the Psalms the “Prayerbook of the Bible”. In all 150 psalms there is a connection with the Divine from the author, be it David or someone else. Each psalm reveals strong emotions. The 23rd Psalm talks about eating a magnificent banquet in front of our enemies. It speaks of confidence in God and of living in God’s house.

The Psalms are where humans get closest to the Divine. The other books of the bible are mostly stories written about situations and people. The Psalms are all written directly to God. They contain both universal truths and situational experiences, written as poetry and often set to music.

The Psalms are thousands of years old, yet many of their themes are common and timeless. Some psalms are about rage, anger, and injustice. Some are laments about death, loss and sadness. Some are written with images serene and peaceful yet others with images of violence and hatred. Psalm 62 is about pushing aside that which does not matter, and focusing on what does.

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

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

Selah

(Psalm 62, NRSV)

In case you were curious, we see the word *Selah*, occurs 74 times in the bible, 71 times in the Psalms and 3 times in the Book of Habakkuk. It is one of those words that is not clearly translatable. It is meant as a place for the singer or cantor of the psalm or song to take a breath, it is also believed to mean forever.

Psalm 62 is about letting go of the “stuff”, the adverts that tell us we need to be something other than we are. According to most adverts that I see I need to lose weight, I need to work out, I need to reduce my wrinkles, and doing things will fix my mental illness, and I’m like “Ummm, excuse me? Say what now?”

First of all, that's not how mental illness works. And secondly, I've earned every one of these wrinkles. I am not interested in your lotions and potions. I am not interested in your diet or eating plan. I am not interested in your daily affirmations and pollyanna musings. What I am interested in is being me. Being real. Being flawed. Of answering the call to my vocation in being my very best, while taking better care of myself. Of trusting first and foremost in God.

At the Inauguration this past Wednesday, the newly appointed Youth Poet Laureate, Amanda Gorman, read from her original poem "The Hill We Climb" Ms. Gorman is the very first Youth Poet Laureate of the United States.

In her poem she writes,

"When day comes we ask ourselves,
where can we find light in this never-ending shade?
The loss we carry, a sea we must wade.
We've braved the belly of the beast,
we've learned that quiet isn't always peace
and the norms and notions of what just is,
isn't always justice."

from "The Hill We Climb" by Poet Laureate, Amanda Gorman
(from her Inaugural address, 20 January 2021)

Her poem is about overcoming adversity. It is about hope. It is about trust. It is similar to the themes of Psalm 62, it is beautifully powerful.

She writes,

"our people diverse and beautiful
will emerge battered and beautiful,
when the day comes
we step out of the shade
aflame and unafraid,
the new dawn blooms as we free it,
for there is always light
if only we're brave enough to see it,
if only we're brave enough to be it."

from "The Hill We Climb", by Poet Laureate, Amanda Gorman
(from her Inaugural address, 20 January 2021)

Nearly 3,500 years separate the writing of Psalm 62 and “The Hill We Climb”. Both are about hope. Both are about trust. “The Hill We Climb” is about stepping into the light after a time of darkness. Psalm 62 is about finding God in the light.

In Psalm 62 the writer realises that people are human, and thus fallible. To put all your faith in one person can be catastrophic, unless that one is God. Throughout my life there have been people I have depended on who have led me astray and hurt me in one form or another. Yet even as a young child, when I was in crisis I would reach out to God.

Now, I was too young to understand just “what” or “who” God is. I didn’t have the language to name a deity, it was more that the Holy Spirit was there as a trusted, beloved imaginary friend. When I was young I had an imaginary friend and she was very real to me. She was a comforter in times of difficulty.

I would talk to her at night, in my bed, and we would figure out ways to make the next day better. When I got older I didn’t talk to my friend anymore. Was it that I outgrew her? Was it that I no longer needed her? Did she leave me? I don’t know.

What I do know, is that I wanted proof that I was not alone, even when I felt alone. I wanted to know that there was someone, somewhere who would love me in the darkness, in the solitude, in the deep fear.

At a particularly difficult time in my life I was told, by my doctor, to take a month off work. I needed to recover from trauma and heal. That it would take time. I would need to wait. At first I didn’t know what to do with myself. One day I pulled down the bible from my bookshelf and started reading the Psalms. I got to Psalm 62, and I read:

“Once God has spoken;
twice have I heard this:
that power belongs to God,
and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord.” (Psalm 62, NRSV)

I started to cry. Even, in the darkness, even in the solitude, even at my most afraid, God was with me. I was protected, I was cherished, and I was loved.

When I didn't have the strength to believe in myself, and didn't have the trust to believe in anyone else, God was already there.

God has always been there.

For Amanda Gorman, when she was making history last Wednesday,

For Dietrich Bonhoeffer, when he wrestled with his conscience and the price of that decision was his life,

For everyone who has endured a "dark night of the soul",

For you, in your worst times.

For you, in your best times.

God is there.

More than money, or fame, or anything that is "stuff" will ever be.

God is there. Always has been. Always will be.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Epiphany 3 - 24 January 2021

Psalm 62

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