

Searched by the Psalms Series at Brentwood

June 13, 2010

Sighs and Cries

Psalm 5:1-8 and Luke 7:36 – 8:3
(Hymns 760, 575, 358, 476)

How Christians approach suffering
has been the subject
of tens of thousands of sermons
and thousands of books.

This morning I'm going to add one more sermon
to that ever-expanding library.

The text for this sermon is the first 8 verses of Psalm 5.

In the NRSV translation,
the Psalmist prays to God
to give heed to his sighs
and listen to the sound of her cries.

In the context of the rest of the Psalm,
these sighs and cries
arise because of the actions of others.
Verses 4-6 speak of wickedness, evil,
the boastful, those who speak lies,
the bloodthirsty, and the deceitful.
The Psalmist reminds the worshippers]
singing this Psalm
that God abhors these behaviours
that cause suffering for both the perpetrators and for others.

The solution to this kind of suffering
is as simple as it is difficult.

Stop doing it!

Repent!

Turn around and change your attitudes and behaviours!

Go and sin no more!

There's a rich vocabulary in the Christian faith
for this way of ending suffering.
But it all depends on one fundamental choice,
a choice that, once made, guides every other choice.

The fundamental choice is this:
to see yourself as a beloved friend of God,
reconciled to your Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer in Jesus Christ,
and continually accompanied by the Holy Spirit so you can flourish as a blessing.

It is the choice to live in Jesus Christ and be loyal to Jesus Christ.

It is the choice to see your life defined by your relationship with Jesus Christ.

You make this choice with the help of God.
With God's guidance, you develop the habits of the Christian life,
the disciplines of a Christian way of being,
so the choice becomes part of you,
something you don't have to concentrate on with every decision,
something you nurture in your redeemed nature.

The disciplines of the Christian life,
the practices that produce blessings,
are familiar to us.
We worship together,
we pray,
we listen to and are searched by the Scriptures,
we learn in dialogue with each other,
we enjoy fellowship in a wide variety of ways,
and we serve each other and our neighbours.

These are the things you told me you valued most here at Brentwood
when we were getting to know each other last fall.
These are the things that we included in our invitation
for people to join us in our enjoyment of flourishing in the faith.

*The friendly folk at Brentwood Presbyterian Church warmly invite you to
get centred in Jesus Christ in worship and learning,
enjoy community with Jesus Christ in fellowship, and
experience the compassion of Jesus Christ in service/*

If we faithfully live these disciplines and practices,
our sighs and cries
will always be expressed
into a world defined by God's abundant love.
Our sighs and cries
will always be directed to the God who redeems us to be a blessing,
no matter what is happening to us.

You see, that's the model of sighing and crying

that we find in Psalm 5.
The Psalmist is not overwhelmed or defined
by the suffering he experiences
at the hands of the wicked, the evil,
the boasters, the liars,
the bloodthirsty, or the deceitful.
They are real, but he chooses not to give them the final word.
She will not allow them to define her world.

All of these experiences,
very real experiences,
are laid before God in prayer, petition, and promise.

The prayer is to be heard.
Give ear and listen to my sighs and cries.
They arise from real pain and suffering.

The petition is to be relieved.
I know that suffering is not how you intend life to be lived.
You yearn that we flourish in relationship with you.

And the promise is to worship and follow God.
Through the abundance of your steadfast love,
with you as my strength and guide,
I can refocus my attention on the flourishing faith
you have given me in Jesus Christ.
I can live in and with the Holy Spirit
to worship and be righteous.
I can refuse to respond in kind to those who hurt and harm,
but can be a witness to a different way of life,
one that gives voice to your abundant love.

This is the answer to suffering that I find in this Psalm.
Approach God in prayer, confident in his commitment to give heed and listen.
Be blunt and honest in your petitions, describing what you experience.
But do not stay stuck in your suffering.
Promise to worship and follow.
That will move you from the passive to the active,
from victim to victor.
That will make you a true friend of Jesus Christ,
flourishing in the faith and being a blessing to yourself and others.

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