

**Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church**

**Sun, Sept 30, 2018**

**Is God Our Steadfast Friend? – Longing/Loneliness  
(Psalm 22)**



**In you our ancestors trusted;  
they trusted and you delivered them.  
To you they cried, and were saved;  
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.  
(Ps 22:4-5)**

**A lesson from the psalm**

It's another t-shirt day – this time it's orange – it's intended to invite us to face the grim truth about the trauma caused by residential schools in Canada and to consider the mission we have to be ambassadors of God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ – a reconciliation that encompasses the whole world – a reconciliation that is lived out, every day in every circle of influence we have been given, in justice, kindness, and humility – and this psalm, remembered and uttered by Jesus on the most traumatic day of his life, speaks so powerfully of both the depths of the sufferings we impose on each other and the heights of our healing as we realize God's love is and has always been with us – Coast Salish artist Luke Marston's awe-inspiring bentwood box used for Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission – "So many of our people suffer from the abuse of residential schools. I feel that the purpose of this Box will change Canada forever. It was a great honour to be selected to carve this box for all the students of former residential schools." - what I see is this - the traumatized are portrayed in pain and prayer – the crosses above, both a symbol of the distorted interpretations of Christianity that imposed this suffering, but also of the hope of transformation and healing that flows, by God's mysterious and miraculous love, from that instrument of torture and execution

**Provocative points to ponder**

- When we dismiss people, any people, as less than fully human, created in the image of God to be God's friends and companions in reconciliation – when we feel like, or treat others like, 'worms' – despised and rejected – objects to be refashioned in the image of some human ideal of perfection - then we are complicit in the trauma that leads to this kind of lament – we are barriers to the work of God's reconciling grace that seeks the flourishing of all of creation in all its God-given diversity
- We have seen this week in the US the mess caused by a callous complicity in denying the truth of trauma – the freezing fear of admitting to being traumatized – the desperate denial of doing the traumatizing – the polarizing effects of taking simplistic sides in such a situation
- the lament tradition in the Judeo-Christian tradition offers a different way of confronting these realities – it is not an easy way – it is rooted in a humility that nourishes kindness

and, eventually, flourishes in a more just community – it happens in community – with God, with each other, and with our complex and conflicted selves – it follows the flow of our worship each week – acceptance of God’s invitation into the reality of the Commonwealth of God that we remember each week in our wonder at God’s reconciling grace – openness to hearing afresh God’s promises of deliverance from shame and salvation for service – gratitude for the transformations in attitudes and behaviours that are generated within us and among us each week by this time and space of worship – here’s one way of looking at this flow of God’s grace – from the loneliness of feeling forsaken to the laughter of being delivered into God’s Commonwealth

### **Finding this in God’s living Word, Jesus Christ**

- there was a depth of faith, an assurance of God’s presence, in Jesus Christ that I do not pretend to understand – I long for it – I aspire to it – I delight in the moments of it that I experience – and I crave this community, and others, where the friends of Jesus nourish each other in this peculiar puzzling grace – in the garden, abandoned by friends and praying that the trauma end – on the cross, feeling totally forsaken – then in another garden, assuring terrified friends that the impossible had indeed happened, through God’s steadfast and enduring love – as we face truthfully and courageously the messy mire our certitudes have created, may the steadfast friendship of God heal us, reconcile us, and make us ambassadors of that reconciliation in all of our circles of influence

### **Your Notes**

### **Prayers of the people offering thanks, seeking help, and being awed**

*[The form and flow of thanks, help, and awe is taken from Anne Lamott’s wonderful little book on prayer, **Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers** (New York: Riverhead Books, 2012).]*