

14 Pentecost Yr A, 3/09/2023
Ps 26:1-8
Pastor Garth Wehrfritz-Hanson

“God’s vindication”

Have you ever been treated unjustly and/or accused of something that you did not do? I think most, if not all of us can answer “yes” to that question. At one time or another you and I, everyone, has likely been treated unjustly, and/or falsely accused of something. I think it happens every day, somewhere in the world, as well as in the church, because we live in an imperfect, sinful world. You and I, everyone—we are all sinners. In today’s psalm, David prays to God for help; he feels that one or more people have done him wrong, treated him unjustly, and/or accused him of something that he did not do. The NRSV *Lutheran Study Bible* gives Psalm 26 this title: “Plea for Justice and Declaration of Righteousness.”

In verse 1, David begins his prayer in the NRSV rendering: “Vindicate me, O LORD....” The REB renders it like this: “LORD, uphold my cause....” *The Message* puts it like this: “Clear my name, God....” Although David certainly was a sinner, like the rest of us--in all three of these Bible versions, there is a further emphasis on David’s moral-ethical uprightness. The NRSV translation continues verse 1 like this: “...for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.” The REB translates it like this: “...for I have led a blameless life, and put unfaltering trust in you.” *The Message* puts it like this: “...I’ve kept an honest shop. I’ve thrown in my lot with you, God, and I’m not budging.” Note here that the word “blameless” in the REB does not mean David was perfect, without sin. No. Rather, it refers to David’s moral-ethical uprightness with the help, of course, of God’s forgiveness, love and grace.

In verses 2-3, David continues in declaring his “innocence” or “righteousness.” *The Message* renders verses 2 and 3 in this rather colourful way, describing God with medical, doctor-like qualities and actions, and David as a willing patient being examined by Dr. God: “Examine me, God, from head to foot,

order your battery of tests. Make sure I'm fit inside and out So I never lose sight of your love, But keep in step with you, never missing a beat."

In verses 4 and 5, David tells God that he avoids four different types of people who would lead him away from God and God's purposes. He avoids "the worthless, hypocrites, evildoers and the wicked." In contrasting himself and his motives in verses 1-3, with these four other types of people and their motives, David likely believed that God should vindicate him.

Speaking of vindication, of upholding a just cause, that reminds me of the following story, about the Métis of Ste. Madeleine, Manitoba, which you may have watched on a recent T.V. newscast.

In the third weekend of July every year since 1990, Red River Métis gather in a field 340 kilometres west of Winnipeg as cattle graze around them.

Thirty-five Métis families used to live in a village here. They had a church and a school and homes until the government burned it all to the ground in 1938 to make way for a community pasture where area farmers could leave their cattle to feed off the land.

"I don't think many Manitobans or even Canadians know this story where cattle were more precious than human beings and the Métis people," says Manitoba Métis Federation president David Chartrand.

All that remains now is the community's cemetery, where village founders and many of their descendants are laid to rest.

Elder Verna DeMontigny's family is here. She has her own plot set aside for when the time comes. But she and others hope to live here someday—not just be buried here.

The federation is in talks with the Manitoba government to get the Crown land back from the cattle that displaced them.

Verna DeMontigny's parents had settled in this area of rolling hills near Binscarth, Man., in the 1930s.

"Families used to move and follow each other, digging seneca roots in the summer," she explains, and they'd often be gone for months working as labourers for area farmers.

Times were tough in the Dirty 30s and settlers needed a community pasture for their animals. The federal government decided that the spot where the village of Ste. Madeleine stood would be ideal. It would be destroyed while families were away working.

DeMontigny was told the story by her father.

“When they came back in the middle of October, their house was already burned down,” she says. The family’s frantic dog was shot dead in front of them by government authorities, he told her.

The Métis were forced to scatter throughout southwestern Manitoba with only the clothes and belongings they had with them. The land was eventually given to the Manitoba government, which set up a pasture association to manage it.

In 1990, descendants decided to gather at the former village site for a weekend each July to share culture and to remember the history here.

Kim Smith of the Ste. Madeleine Métis local is an organizer and descendant. Smith, like DeMontigny and others hopes they can stay here permanently one day. She says, “I was coming here thinking maybe one day my grandchildren will be able to live here.”

Chartrand has been working for years to make it happen. And in this time that governments are thinking about reconciliation now more than ever, he feels it’s close to happening.

“The thing that people better realize is Métis never give up and so from our perspective, we will get this land back. I’ve been speaking to the premier on this matter and we are in my view, very close,” he says.

Returning the land, he says, is the only way to right the historic wrong, and they continue to wait to see if it happens.¹ Hopefully, by God’s grace, God will work through the government authorities in order to vindicate the Métis.

Coming back to our psalm, in verses 7-8, it seems that God either vindicated David, or he was hopeful that God would vindicate him, since he prepared to worship God by a ritual hand washing, symbolizing cleanliness in God’s presence

¹ An abridged version of: Melissa Ridgen, “Red River Métis displaced by cattle want land back from Manitoba,” at: <<https://globalnews.ca/news/9839112/red-river-metis-ste-madeleine-land/>>.

in God's house, and, in *The Message* rendering: "Singing God-songs at the top of my lungs, telling God-stories. God, I love living with you; your house glows with your glory."

Ultimately, God has vindicated and will vindicate us. He has vindicated us, he has upheld our cause, he has cleared our name, thanks to the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus, our Saviour and Messiah. Like David, may we joyfully respond to God's saving work in Jesus by worshipping, and singing God-songs at the top of our lungs, and telling God-stories. For indeed, we do have wonderful stories to tell, renewing our faith over and over again, stories that never become out of date or irrelevant—stories of God's creation, the fall, a cross bringing redemption in Christ, and new creation through resurrection life. That's my story for today, and, thanks to the grace of God, I'm sticking to it!