

18 Pentecost Yr A, 1/10/2023  
Ps 25:1-9  
Pastor Garth Wehrfritz-Hanson

“Patience and humility”

The superscription of Psalm 25 is: “Of David.” According to Rabbi Shelomo ben Yitzhak, who was better known as Rashi, whenever a superscription started with the words, “Of David,” it meant that God had inspired David first, without any effort on his part—whereas when a superscription ended with the words “of David,” it meant that David had to play his harp first, before God’s Spirit inspired him.

The NRSV *Lutheran Study Bible* gives Psalm 25 this title: “Prayer for Guidance and Deliverance.” The psalm is an acrostic poem, with one letter of the Hebrew alphabet following another to begin each line.

Patiently waiting. Ours is a world in which more and more people seem to be unable to patiently wait. You are likely familiar with the prayer: “Lord, grant me patience, but hurry up please.” That prayer, humorous and ironic as it is, I think, epitomizes the mind-set and heart-set of far too many people today. As the old saying goes, too often peoples’ “patience wears thin.” That reminds me of the following story.

As a visitor to a small West African town, an American pastor made sure to arrive on time for a 10 a.m. Sunday service. Inside the humble sanctuary, however, he found the room empty. So he waited. One hour. Two hours. Finally about 12:30 p.m., when the local pastor arrived after his long walk there—followed by some choir members and a gathering of friendly town people—the service began “in the fullness of time,” as the U.S. pastor said. The Spirit welcomed them all, and God wasn’t late. The U.S. pastor understood the culture was different here for its own good reasons.

As theologian Howard Thurman wrote, “We wait, our Father, until at last something of thy strength becomes our strength, something of thy heart becomes our heart, something of thy forgiveness becomes our forgiveness. We wait, O God, we wait.”<sup>1</sup>

In our psalm today, the psalmist prays, in verse 3: “Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame.” And again, at the end of verse 5, the psalmist prays: “for you (i.e. God) I wait all day long.” However, in the REB, these two verses are translated differently, and in this translation, the psalmist comes across more confidently: “No one whose hope is in you is put to shame.” And the end of verse 5 of the REB goes like this: “in you I put my hope all day long.” So looking at both the NRSV and REB translations of these verses, one is given the impression that waiting on God involves hope in God—that there will be, as in the West African story, a hopeful outcome when one waits on God.

In the psalm, the psalmist also comes before God, humbly, with an open heart and open mind, he prays in verses 4 and 5, asking God to: “teach me.” The Good News rendering puts it like this: “Teach me your ways, O LORD; make them known to me. Teach me to live according to your truth.” In other words, the psalmist has a student-learner attitude. He doesn’t know everything, and is willing to keep learning and growing in his faith journey.

The psalmist’s attitude of “teach me” is the exact opposite of those people in B.C. earlier this summer during the wildfires, who refused to listen to the authorities about evacuating for their own safety. In one case, a person driving a truck ignored a person who was flagging them to stop. The truck driver kept going, and dodged the barricades—travelling down a road which had been closed in order to protect people from the wildfire.

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Raybon, “Never Late,” devotion for January 17, 2023, in: *Our Daily Bread*, December, January, February 2022-2023.

In the recent past, you may recall, there were two famous women—Mother Teresa and Imelda Marcos. Both were Roman Catholic and both claimed to believe in Jesus. One lived a life dedicated to helping the poor and ill in India while the other lived a life of self-indulgence, having over 3,000 pairs of shoes. Question: What makes the difference in the way the two women lived their lives? The answer, of course, involves humility.

Rabbi Meir of Apt once said: “The true service of God is the achievement of humility with joy. How can one rejoice in feeling humble? By knowing that thereby one is fulfilling the will of God. That alone is sufficient reason for joy.”

Basically humility is the attitude of one who stands constantly under the judgement of God. It is the attitude of one who is like the soil. Humility comes from the Latin word *humus*, fertile ground. The fertile ground is there, unnoticed, taken for granted, always there to be trodden upon. It is silent, inconspicuous, dark and yet it is always ready to receive any seed, ready to give it substance and life. The more lowly, the more fruitful, because it becomes really fertile when it accepts all the refuse of the earth. It is so low that nothing can soil it, abase it, humiliate it, it has accepted the last place and cannot go any lower. In that position nothing can shatter the soul’s serenity, its peace and joy.<sup>2</sup>

Now does that remind you of Someone? Here’s a hint, Paul writes about that Someone in today’s second lesson, which scholars believe to be one of the earliest Christians hymns: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” Jesus humbled himself by willingly dying the lowest of the low criminal’s death on a cross. Yet, that death was, ironically, the

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<sup>2</sup> From *Living Prayer* by Anthony Bloom, cited in: Rueben P. Job & Norman Shawchuck, *A Guide to Prayer* (Nashville: The Upper Room Books, 1983), p. 321.

perfect sign of being humble, as well as the perfect sign of hope beyond the cruel, humiliating suffering and death. Hope because of what that death accomplished and brought us—namely life, abundant life, full life, saving, resurrection life.

So in Jesus's death there is new life for each one of us. A life in which we are free to follow Jesus's perfect example of being humble, being willing to have him teach us, so that we can continue to learn and grow in our faith journey. So that as we learn and grow in our faith journey, we will want to, like Jesus, lovingly serve others.

Someone once said: "Great people forget themselves and serve others. That is why they are remembered by others." Most of us are unlikely to have our names in the history books or even in the headlines of the newspapers, but there is a kind of "greatness" we can all share—greatness of the heart, being remembered by others because we have forgotten ourselves and have served others.

So, by the grace of God, may we be able to wait patiently, live with hope, be humble enough that Jesus can continue to teach us, and by learning from him, be willing to lovingly serve others.