

Psalm 40:1-11  
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Returning from vacation this past Monday, I came home to many emails telling of numerous Care concerns which arose while I was gone. I quickly became aware how, for many of you, the new year had begun with sorrow, disappointment, fear, and grief.

My heart broke as I sat reading emails about tremendous pain experienced over the holidays. The litany included; death, hospice, recuperation, and hospitalization; there was the plea for a member's co-worker who lost everything in a fire.

A couple days before I left I received news of Roland Buse, one of our oldest living members who moved to the Dallas area last summer to be closer to family... Roland fell trying to get out of bed to get milk one night and late in December required hip surgery. He had moved to a rehabilitation facility and was progressing well until his son contacted me this weekend to say he was hospitalized in Intensive care. Worship may not be the place we can do a lot of personal caregiving. But it is a place as a community we can ask our questions. Where is God? Why did this have to happen at this time of year?

Psalm 40 begins in the first person, it is the voice of one who has experienced suffering before and is currently facing a time of deep distress. As I studied the psalm I noticed a certain ebb and flow. The Psalmist remembers past times of suffering, and recalls God's goodness restoring life. This provides a measure of strength and hope even when he cannot see an end to his pain. It is a caution against Tunnel Vision, by widening our memory, the Psalmist opens us to receive the working of God's light and love in our current time of concern.

Those emails I read Monday drew to mind times of suffering faced by the people of Israel. The bible tells of Egyptian Slavery, Babylonian Exile, and the illness, war, famine, Hunger, thirst, corruption, and homelessness the people encountered. How did they keep faith in such desperate times? In part they remembered God's goodness to them in the past. And they did this through telling stories and singing songs of God's faithfulness.

I love how Psalm 40 invites us to sing a new song. I was sitting in the pews at Plymouth Church years ago, in my own dark night of the soul, the organ struck up a cord and we sang a song whose lyrics are part of a poem known as "St. Patrick's Breastplate,"... The lyrics helped me recognize where God was in my time of confusion, "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit up, Christ when I arise, Christ in the heart of every person (sic) who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me." My trouble didn't disappear on the spot but it was replaced with a promise of clarity the calm, assurance of God's Spirit.

Today we hear endless dialogue about how to protect ourselves. Competing plans and programs, searches and scans, walls and policies seeking to guard us from anyone and everything which might seek to do us harm. But as Psalm 40 points out today, the life of faith doesn't come with an adversity free guarantee. The life of faith does come with the assurance of God's resurrection love.

It is a different kind of security.

On this weekend when we celebrate the life and prophetic calling of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., we might expect inspiring words about Racial Justice, or fiery quotes about the injustice of war, but Dr. King spoke these words about the relationship of faith and pain, "The Christian Faith makes it possible to accept that which cannot be changed, and to meet disappointments and sorrow with an inner poise, and to absorb the most intense pain without abandoning our sense of hope."

The Apostle Paul writes about this power for life in the face of death when in Acts we read, "But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held by its power."

Colleague Anthony Robinson reflects, "Here in Acts, Peter has told the story of Jesus. He repeats all the sad words again: "betrayed," "handed over," "crucified" and "killed," each one a nail in the coffin. The world has done its worst. But that's not the end of the story. Peter went on, "But God." God has the last word. And that word is life. That word is resurrection." Resurrection is the power of God working in us to, as we sing sometimes from the World Peace Prayer, "Lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth, from despair to hope, from fear to trust; Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace..."

God's resurrection power floods every moment of life rebuilding hope and strength step by step. It isn't always an immediate process because resurrection is Hand crafted by The Master. Yet, when we see God's resurrection power... The Psalmist tells us today to SHARE THE STORY.

Tell anyone and everyone how trusting in God helped you find a new song to sing. And if you are at a loss for words to say, look at the redemptions songs you hold in your hands each week. Songs about Amazing Grace and Blessed Assurance. Songs of those who fell only to land in God's everlasting arms. Share your Story of God's Resurrecting love.

In spring of 1985, U2's The Unforgettable Fire tour stopped in Hartford, Connecticut. The final encore that night was the song "40," an adaptation of Psalm 40. As the band left the stage one by one they had struck a powerful cord in the crowd. Even once the stage was empty the enthusiastic crowd continued to sing the song's refrain, "I will sing, sing a new song." Even as the crowd poured out of the stadium, huge groups of fans carried the tune on to the city streets, "I will sing, sing a new song."

Go into the week ahead and sing, sing a new song.

Amen