

“Active Waiting”

June 6, 2021

Sermon by Dawn Jefferson at TriCon Church on Zoom

Psalm 130

Will you pray with me?

*“Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take him at his word.*

*Just to rest upon his promise, just to know thus saith the Lord.*

*Jesus Jesus how I trust you. How I've proved you o'er and o'er.*

*Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus, Oh, for grace to trust you more.”*

God today we are watching for your grace, we are trusting you more, we are waiting for YOU to answer our every question. Today, we are dreaming and believing that our waiting will not be in vain. Amen.

I walked through the lectionary for this week's sermon but the Spirit led me to Psalms instead. Truthfully, I have a deep praise in my heart today. There are things happening in my own life and for those around me that have been a long time coming, and I wondered what it would be like to try to not just sing a psalm or quote a psalm but to preach through one. So here goes.

For as much as I feel the ground beneath my feet today, I can remember dark places, very sad places of my past. I just want to say personally that I've been having some really wonderful days lately, days full of the fruition of delayed gratification, challenges that I've been waiting to change for a long time, years even, and as much as I relish in that joy, I also remember what it was like to be in a deep pit. I remember what it was to cry out to God and wonder if God even recognized the sound of my voice anymore. I will say that remembering that difference is the beginning of faith.

It is significant to identify with the very beginning of this 130th Psalm in our worship experience. While some of us may be on a mountaintop, there is likely someone else we love, a neighbor, the stranger at our grocery store

who cannot see past the dark pit of their present circumstances. The **dark deep** can be a troubling time. The scripture meditation this week made me sit with the testimony and the story of something that’s been in the news or even in your backyard. It brought me to a popular or infamous “species of the moment” who knows something about dark depths - the CICADA.

Yes, “Brood 10,” the present species of cicada many in the East Coast are experiencing is an insect whose journey has been long. The cicada lives as a nymph 8 feet underground for 17 years. I’ve been trying to imagine what that would be like as a person to be in a dark place, waiting for 17 years. I mean, I’ve watched customers freak out after waiting for 7 minutes in a restaurant. Hannah waited over 10 years to birth Samuel, the Count of Monte Cristo was in prison for 14 years, Nelson Mandela for 27 years. Time like that can wear you down. There is faith and there is hope but for almost a decade? Waiting for one thing, one person is tough. We’ve all waited a bit, even in this last year, we know about waiting.

But I was blessed by reading this psalm through the experience of the Cicada. I kept wondering not unlike those who are incarcerated, those living with chronic illness, those separated from their home country, I kept wondering, what should we do in the MEAN TIME? What do cicadas do during those 17 years? Well, the science articles say that the cicada is able to find what they need in the darkness. In many ways, the dark depth of the ground is where they find the nutrients that feed them for them to grow. They live off the roots of plants and trees. They are always growing. They are waiting to sing, waiting to mate, waiting to continue the longevity of their species. And for those 17 years they keep on going.

So, the scripture, Psalm 130 tells us something that we get in return for our waiting in the dark deep. We get God’s attention. In the midst of the darkness, the Psalmist petitions God to hear their voice. Part of our faith in Christ is that he is listening and he does hear. That would probably only

change the way you felt about it if you have already known what it is to be heard by God before!

My God, if you have yet to witness God move in your life, then the waiting, the waiting, I think feels mostly impossible. If it's your first time having your mind blown by the possibility of God, then I get that struggle. But for those of us who have waited before . . . for those of us who have crawled from exhaustion, been overwhelmed and almost done, stayed on a crummy job, or saved up for a dream, and then encountered God's intervention, we can believe in God's hearing ear and tangible embrace. We can proclaim and praise that we know that God is all attentive, all merciful, faithful unto us! Cause we've been there and we remember.

For those of you who are not quite familiar with God in this way or who aren't quite sure about this whole waiting for God thing. I can say for myself as a believer, that God has heard my cries for mercy. And I believe that God HEARS YOU too!! I cannot promise that every one of your desires or prayers will be answered the way you want; God doesn't promise that either, but I can guarantee that God hears you. God is an ACTIVE LISTENER. God is not always silent. There are affirmations along the way. Sometimes they are found in our friendships, in the simplicity of something going right. Still, God is not passive. God is listening to you.

In verse 4, the Psalmist explains that we know God hears us for all the ways God continues to forgive us. During our waiting, God could keep a record of our wrongs, our sin. The Hebrew says that God could literally keep and watch out for our sins, but God does not do that. Instead God forgives!!! What if God was NOT paying as much attention to your mistakes as much as God is listening out for your cries for mercy?

Would you then wait for God with ALL of yourself? Would you be willing to put all of your hope in the basket of God's responding to you with merciful kindness? That is what this song is about...There is a dialogue here. For while

God is actively listening, God is watching us actively wait with our whole selves. God sees us getting ready and restoring our faith. Gathering what we can in the shadows for when the sun will shine again. We are not to be dormant and sleeping, but like the cicada, ever growing, ever waiting for the right temperature and the right time to come back to life above ground.

Before we go, Let's explore this watchmen metaphor for just one moment.... It is repeated twice as a chorus in a song. The psalmist waits for God more than the watchman waits for the morning. The watchman searches the streets when others are sleeping. They secure the borders and walls of the city. There may be anxiety in watching, hoping that nothing will happen at night. But the watcher is ready. In situations not unlike what is happening in Palestine and Israel, the watcher is actively waiting for the sign of day's breaking. Waiting for the morning here means that the watcher's shift will be over when the sun shows up. They are now free to do something else and declare one more night of peace.

We all know what it is like when we can't wait for a day to be over just so the next one will hurry on and come -- when you're reunited with the love of your heart, or your child comes home from a long trip, or it's the big day of a great celebration. Once that light hits the sky, it's on!! It's happening!

Some people philosophize about waiting. They want it to make sense. I had a friend ask me, so like what's the purpose of the cicada? What is it waiting for?... I have decided that it's not sophisticated or complicated. The cicada's purpose is to LIVE!! To wait out the darkness so that they can see and experience God's creative mercy. So, I want to just note that for any of you who feel like something you did made God cause you to wait longer as punishment, that's not what this scripture says. That is not the God I serve.

It might not seem glorious to you, but I wonder what it feels like for the cicada to have waited that long and finally be above ground -- in a different place, with a new opportunity. This is they're chance, what they've been

waiting for. So yes, the cicadas are a little creepy and terribly slow, but I just can't help but root for them. There's a little celebration going on inside of me when I see them. Because I commiserate with what it was to wait to live again! To come up from a pit and breathe fresh air. And I don't fear them because I know they're not here for me. They are not after me, they are after life -- they are reaching for the trees to eat, to feed, and to nurture themselves for their next cycle of life.

And so it is that I am rooting for you as you flutter and sing for your own life. I celebrate with you in love for all that you are waiting for too. But, the distinct difference between this psalm and much of our human experience is that we are often waiting for things or situations, but the Psalmist is waiting for GOD!

In this season of Pentecost, I want to declare that we need not wait in the same way. For us, God is present and available. For us, we need not wait for God; God is already here, having forgiven us and offering redemption. So, our sharing in communion this morning, let us celebrate God. Let us in communion, reconcile and declare the wait is over. Although we are not together in the sanctuary, let us not forget the CALL to worship.

This lovely psalm reminds us of seasons in our lives when we walk through dark moments and feelings, when our hope in God might waiver. But by the end, your souls can at least witness the ascent of the spirit. Psalm 130 is what is called a “Song of Ascent” or a “Song of Degrees”. It is to be sung in repetition, over and over. It seems intended to lift ME as the lyrics change...For it ends in reconciliation, a new morning, unfailing love; it ends in our eternal redemption from all that had separated us from the divine. This psalm calls us into worship to meditate on God's great mercy and love. We invite you to engage with God during the rest of this service as if you had been waiting all night long for the beginning of this day.

We must reimagine that connection with God, practice it all over again -- what it was to sing songs in the shower, fall asleep praying, sit along a stream

and trace the Spirit's movement through the light in the water...However it has been that you have been with and relished the presence of God. Let us go there today. Let's get inside of the cicadas' song and the buzz of their living, let us wait for God, wait for God, feel God, and celebrate God.

After I finish preaching, you will hear a song with a similar theme. As you listen to the following song, let the ascent wash over you, let the rise of and flourish of the notes build up in your heart. Celebrate with us how waiting on God is not a passive languishing, but an active hoping that something will change when God arrives and shows up in us. Let us give our WHOLE selves to the God we had waited for. Keep looking out your window. Keep looking for the sky to change. God is near.

AMEN!

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