

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

THE WORSHIP OF GOD • FEBRUARY 3, 2019

Psalm Litany

Based on Psalm 71

We take refuge in you, O Lord.

Deliver us through your righteousness.

Hear us and save us.

Rescue all those abused by the intentions
of the wicked, the unjust and cruel.

**We have leaned upon you from our births;
our praise is continually of you.**

Let us pray:

To whom else shall we turn, Lord of our lives?

We place our lives in your tender care. Amen.

The Scripture

Luke 4:21-30

Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

The Message

Be on Your Way

Nick Larson

When I first arrived at Broadway, the Reverend Kim Gage Ryan called me. I wondered why a previous minister of this church was calling the new minister. Trust me; she had nothing but wonderful things to say about the church. However, Kim told me about Bethany Fellows, about this circle of young pastors, who were there for each other. It is

a force to help keep young pastors serving local churches. By the way, Kim is in Texas this week receiving an award for her significant leadership in Bethany Fellows. I remember thinking, sure, that's great, but I don't really need that.

When I arrived at Broadway, this was my third church where I served in pastoral ministry. I spent three years before seminary serving as an associate for middle school, high school, and college ministries. I served my student church for almost three-and-a-half years, working a lot with young adults in San Francisco. I felt like I knew how to do this ministry thing.

Yet, I had no idea. I knew a lot of good things to do. I could create ministries. I could start small groups, I helped launch beer and theology groups, life groups, and – my favorite – donuts and devotions. I came from serving one of the hippest young Presbyterian churches, where we attracted all kinds of liberal, young professionals – those types the church books say no one can attract. Yet, at Mission Bay, we were full of them.

Yet, despite all my positive ministry experience, I had no idea how to sustain it. That's where we come back around to Bethany Fellows. You see; it was that circle of colleagues, friends, and mentors, that showed me one of the most important things. It showed me how to stop trying quiet so hard.

In a perfect world without the limits of time and space, there are endless good things to give full time to all blessed activities and areas. Existing church programs, pastoral care, new members, homebound members, my children, my marriage, my parents, my hobbies.

Yet, life isn't like that; so you juggle. All the time. Even though I put a brave face on it most of the time, the truth is I am never quite sure if I am keeping all the balls in the air. I always have a vague sense that I am disappointing someone. That's probably only in my mind, but there might be someone I have disappointed. (I'm smiling.) What I do know is that I try. Really hard. And it is the constant trying so hard on so many fronts all the time that often leaves me exhausted.

I have learned that exhaustion from juggling so many balls so much of the time is not going to be touched by a few hours of sleep, and a hot shower in the morning, as my solitude with God.

This is where the truth about Bethany Fellows comes back around. When Kim first described the rhythms of the group to me: Monday, travel and check in day; Tuesday, best practices, and observational learning; Wednesday...this one is the kicker...24-hours of silence. I remember standing in our narthex, right by the Welcome Center, thinking to myself, "There is no way!"

Even after saying “yes” to Kim and getting into those retreats, I honestly couldn’t see how the 24-hours of silence part was going to work, especially for an extrovert like me. Even as I went on my first retreat, I had lots of outs to spend that much time in silence. I had a stack of books, movies to stream, a plan, lesson plans, and sermons to write, and much more.

And that first one wasn’t the easiest, to be honest. But you know what? Then there was the second one six-months later. And another six-months after that. By the fourth retreat, I remember it was something I was actually looking forward to!

That fourth retreat, I arrived very tired. It was six-months after we had Ian, our second child. It was the Fall, after a long camp, mission trip, General Assembly, and VBS summer. And I remember so looking forward to worshipping into silence and then going back to bed!

I imagine this might have been how Jesus was feeling, in our story from Luke this morning. It begins with Jesus, sitting in his home synagogue reading from Isaiah, beginning his public ministry.

And then he goes on this rant. (I think it’s fair to call it that.) He goes on to disrupt those listening to him, saying the gospel he came to bring is so much more than what they think it contains. He informs them that Jesus came not just for the Jews, but for everyone. This grace and mercy offered by Jesus, read from the scroll of Isaiah, refuses to be contained within a religious tradition or an ethnic group. Jesus was universalizing God’s love, that God is *for* everyone.

Yet the human urge to exclude is a strong one. Nowhere is it stronger than in matters of religion, in which defining the community by defining who is not a member serves as a convenient intellectual shorthand for a more rigorous examination of faith.

“Who are we? That is an easy one. We are not *them*. We are *us*.”

The people of the synagogue, that day, are comfortable with their privileged status, and they do not respond well to Jesus questioning it.

So, the enraged crowd of Luke 4, observant Jews to a person, could not stomach the idea of their God extending to someone outside their circle the same favor that they themselves enjoyed. We have not changed so much in two-thousand-years.

So, they led Jesus to the crest in the hill on which the town had been built so that they could throw him off the cliff. Yet, Jesus does something miraculous. He passed through them and went on his way.

We, dear friends, need to understand that we are invited by God to step away from the crowd of righteous zealots that want to accuse and exhaust you. On the very brink of disaster, Jesus leaves. He steps away. He went on his way. It's like after his baptism just earlier in Chapter 4, where Jesus battles the great tempter himself, and faced his demons, in the silence of the wilderness of all places!

In Mark's version of this, Jesus sends out his disciples two-by-two and they start doing really good ministry everywhere but in Nazareth. Even after they have tremendous success, Jesus nudges them, and invites them to, "Come away with him, to rest a while."

God is tenderly inviting you. God is speaking softly below the roar of your life, to join Jesus in an extended time apart for the purpose of being with God and giving God your full and undivided attention.

I learned that this dictated space, 24-hours of silence every six-months, within my schedule was the way that I learned to let go of all my responsibilities for a time. There I could drop into a deeper, quieter place in which I could rest. I could hear God beyond all the demands of my life, others' expectations, and my own inner compulsions.

It is what brought me to that moment, when I was in charge of worshipping into silence at one of our Bethany Fellows retreats, I told the newest fellows among us to settle down, and settle in, to continue letting go of all that they had left behind.

Rev. Ruth Haley Barton calls this the "just flop down" part. Where you arrive at a moment so exhausted and in a dazed state of mind, you are just wondering: What do I do? Relax! There is actually nothing mysterious about it. Sometimes we are just so exhausted that we must go into retreat and just flop down.

That 24-hours of silence was one of the best days of my life. I took a morning nap. I went for a long walk through the woods along a lake. I ate a delicious lunch out on a balcony. I read in a hammock for a while. I ate a quick dinner, watched the sun set over the trees, took a long hot shower, and went to bed, and slept from about 7:30 p.m. till about 8 the next morning.

If we are honest, many of us here have given up hope that we will ever be rested. We have succumbed to the belief that life is out of control, and we have no choice but to walk through it exhausted. We're convinced that being rested is simply not an option or that it is a luxury that we simply cannot afford.

Yet, just a few days ago, in the midst of one of the busiest seasons of my personal and professional life, Julia and I took some time. Many of you know we celebrated 15-years

of marriage this month, and despite being down a pastor, and being a church in transition, despite being the parents of three, busy, active kids. Despite life, we took time.

Terry, you all, our staff, my in-laws, gave us some time away. Julia and I got to go to one of the most beautiful places on planet Earth. We got to enjoy delicious Hawaiian cuisine, including one of the most delicious BBQ places I have ever eaten in my entire life. Here is a shout out to Kiawe Roots.

But, you know what the part I valued most about this trip away, beside getting to spend some lovely time with Julia reading on the beach? I valued so very much that we went to bed when we wanted, and we woke up without alarm clocks. We slept till our bodies were rested!

That is God's invitation to you, to go on retreat to "just flop down," to find a way to let your body call the shots, at least at first. Let go of all the pushing and striving and productivity that usually characterizes your life. Come to believe that in the resting, you are entering into Jesus' invitation to all his busy disciples.

That may feel like a far-fetched place to you right now, but it is God's hope for you! God is, indeed, inviting you to that very place. Your belief, or lack of it, is what is one thing standing in your way.

However, that's where you need to remember that you are invited to retreat. You need to find ways to start to practice it! You can do it, with 24-hours of silence (like Bethany Fellows taught me). You can take longer weekends with the Jesuits. (Those are folks who know how to do solitude.) You can join in one of our Broadway retreats, taking time to be in community, seeking to replenish your stores of energy. Or you can even do it when you climb into bed tonight. At least you can start there.

For when you crawl into bed and begin laying your head on your pillow, let it become an exercise in trusting your whole self – body and soul – to God. As you pull the covers over yourself, imagine that God is putting God's arms around you, holding you, covering you with God's love.

Feel the tiredness in your body subside. Enjoy how good it feels to lie there, invited by God to relax and rest. If cares or concerns surface, trust these to God even as you trust yourself to God.

If you wake up during the night, (which is scientifically proven to be normal and maybe even needed), don't fight your wakefulness. Just allow yourself to become aware that you are with God, and God is with you, looking on you with love as you rest. In this way, you are still resting your soul even as your body is awake.

For our challenge, from the life of Jesus today, is to walk away, to be on our way towards this great invitation that Jesus offers each of us. We need to pull back from our busy-ness, from our life in our culture, from other people's expectations, and our own compulsions, from whatever is not working in our lives.

Too often when we hear the word "retreat," we get lost in the idea that it is somehow losing ground, that our lives can't spare the time. In fact, that is the very time when we need to withdraw, to pull back, to step away, to be on our way.

This isn't about judging ourselves or others in our busy-ness. It isn't a contest to see who can achieve the most through resting. Who can do silence the best? But for your very sake, know that God is for everyone. That's the very message Jesus was spreading when those religious folks wanted to throw him off a cliff.

Don't judge others (or yourself), for when you are judging others, it is a good sign that your bucket is too full. Perhaps it's time that you relinquish and let go...of human striving and human effort...and our addiction to whatever we use to distract ourselves from what needs our attention...of our attempts at controlling everyone and everything.

"Relinquishment" is a synonym to "surrender," and it is, what David is talking about in Psalm 46 when he says, "Be Still [literally let go of your grip], and know [experientially, full-body-knowing] that I am God."

Another way to say this might be, "Let go of your grip and experience letting God be God in your life."

I don't know what God has in store for you, but are you willing to risk what we will to find out?

Thanks be to God. Amen.