

Davidson College Presbyterian Church
Davidson, North Carolina
Lib McGregor Simmons, Pastor
“Looking for Dawn”
Luke 13:1-5; Psalm 63:1-8
Third Sunday in Lent
March 7, 2010

Do you ever wake up in the middle of the night asking the question, “Why?”

I can imagine that those who came to Jesus, their voices vibrating with rage and horror and grief as they reported the incident of “the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices” and “those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them” might have tossed and turned upon their beds asking the question, “Why?”

Yes, perhaps in the face of these events, they lay awake in the middle of the night, asking “Why?” as we sometimes do.

“She is only thirty years old. She feels fine. And the tests show that she has breast cancer. Why?”

“He was the president of our class. He had just gotten his acceptance to college. And he was hit by a drunk driver as he drove home from the basketball game last night and killed. Why?”

“Earthquakes in Haiti and Chile. Drought in Kenya. A family in Hickory mourning the death of the Marine who was their husband, father, son, killed in Afghanistan after four tours in Iraq. Why?”

We ask the question “Why?”, hoping that the dawn will bring us an answer that satisfies.

Jesus doesn’t answer the question however. He does deny that there is any easy connection between what happens to people and the judgment or will of God. Our God is simply not a God making a list and checking it twice before causing bad things to happen to bad people and good things to good people.

Jesus doesn’t answer the question, “Why?” What he does is to suggest that all suffering, any suffering, is an occasion for repentance, which I take to mean examining our lives in the light of God’s love for us and turning our lives in the direction of God and attending to our relationship with the Holy One. All suffering, any suffering, is an occasion for leaning our lives in the direction of God who in all times and in all places opens up possibilities for redemptive change in our lives and possibilities for participating with Jesus in the redemption of suffering and evil in the world.

And a good place to start when we find ourselves in the midst of the questions that suffering sometimes brings is by reading Psalm 63.

*O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.
Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.
So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name.
My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips
when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.
My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.*

When the Psalmist lies awake at night, asking the question “Why?” notice what he does.

First, rather than cut himself off from the community and turn inward in loneliness, he goes to where the worshipers are, the sanctuary, and joins them in praising God. (1) His individual experience of loneliness, of grief, of hopelessness, of death is reflected back into the community of faith. (2)

Just so, when we read Psalm 93 in the midst of our questioning, we come to realize that we do not read it alone. Even when we sit alone with Psalm 93, alone in our beds in the darkness of night or in a darkened nursery rocking a wheezing child or alone at the kitchen table with the newspaper spread before us, its pages chilly with the news of accident, earthquake, and war, alone at the graveside of a loved one or contemplating the moment of our own death, we come to know that, in truth, we are never alone. We pray “O God, you are my God” with countless others, even Jesus himself.

Notice what the Psalmist does. First, rather than cutting himself off from the community of faith, he joins with the whole community in prayer. And second, he does some remembering.

While lying in bed at night, rather than tossing and turning with worry, the Psalmist looks back at a lifetime, putting the day’s suffering in the perspective of months or years. When the Psalmist remembers, when we remember, the times in our lives when we have been sheltered in the shadow of God’s wings, then we can lift up our hearts to God, saying, “You have been my help!” (3)

Psalm 63 begins, “O God, you are my God, I seek you,” the verb *seek* in verse 1 originally meaning “to look for the dawn.” (4) It begins with a person asking “Why?” from the midst of thirst, fainting, dryness, weariness...in short, from a life marked by suffering.

Psalm 63 ends with the sounds of rejoicing and exulting in the graciousness of God. In other words, it culminates in the coming of the dawn.

And this, my friends, is the promise and the good news of the gospel. Thanks be to God.

1. James Limburg, *Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 209.
2. Kathleen Norris, *The Psalms* (New York: Riverhead, 1997), x.
3. Limburg, 209.
4. J. Clinton McCann, Jr., "The Book of Psalms," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. IV (Nashville, Abingdon, 1996), 929.