

Fears Released

Psalm 40:1-11; John 1:29-42

We are in the season of Epiphany. This season launches Jesus' ministry and mission here on Earth. The word *Epiphany* comes from a Greek term meaning "manifestation", or "showing forth". What is illumined in this season by the light of Christ is God's love. God's love is shown to us in Jesus, and the people watch and they see. The people witness to something new.

We proclaim in one of the United Church creedal statements the following: "We believe that God, who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new." God has come to us in Jesus, in human form. As flesh and bone, water and blood. Jesus has come to show us a new way of being and of living: the way of God. The way of hope. The way of compassion. The way of generosity. The way of forgiveness, and the way of love.

Both scriptures testify or witness to God in action in the world. Psalm 40 is a psalm that I often turn to. Throughout my faith journey, I've come to recognize what holds me back from God is trust. There is a Sabbath prayer that the group who does the Scripture Reflections prays every single week, and in it there is a line that catches my attention every single time, and it says: "Help us to grow in our trust in each other and in your Spirit." Help us to grow in our trust in each other and in your Spirit. I can honestly say that when I put my trust in God, I've been able to get through some really tough moments and challenges in my life. Fear, uncertainty and worry can hold us back from all that God offers us. I want you to take a moment: imagine what could happen if we found a way to release our fears. Imagine what would happen if we are fully able to put our trust in God as the psalmist did.

Listen again to what the psalmist said and hear it as his most powerful moment that he experienced in his faith journey. When he called out to God and he said, "I waited patiently for the Lord who inclined to me and heard my cry. The Lord drew me out of the desolate pit, out of the miry bog and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. The Lord put a new song in my mouth. A song of praise to God, and many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord."

One of the most powerful moments that I've had...some of you know I'm a huge fan of U2 and followed them around on one of the concert tours that they did. Hoping, waiting, desiring to hear this one song – and I have seen them many, many times. There I was, in Glasgow, surrounded by thousands of people. At the very end of the concert, they sang 40. 40 is based off of this psalm. The music stopped and everyone sang a cappella: "I will sing, sing a new song." It was such a powerful moment that it brought tears to my eyes, which is not something that is normal for me. But it was something that will stay with me and reminds me of the importance of putting my trust in God.

Early on in my faith journey, as I reflected on this psalm, I remember thinking, *I clearly need to work on patience. I'm not a patient person.* For several years, that was what stuck with me. I need to be more patient and wait patiently for God. But after a while, I started digging into the scripture a bit more, and a scholar pointed out that the first verse is more literally translated from the Hebrew language as: "Waited, I waited." Or: "Waiting, I waited." This doesn't necessarily indicate that there was anything patient about the psalmist's cry. It reflects, I think instead a longing or a plea. Even desperation or resignation. And it's a reminder to all of us that God works on God's time, not our time.¹ This new understanding made a difference for me, and as I read the next verses, things shifted in my understanding. God, then, lifted the psalmist out of the bog, out of that which kept him stuck. And then the psalmist was given a new song to sing. By placing the psalmist on a rock, he was no longer in danger of being drawn, sucked back into that miry bog.

You can think about how many times you suddenly felt release, only to get dragged back into the situation. Dragged back into the same old argument that you've had with somebody. Dragged back into the same old, same old, that doesn't allow you to grow and change. The psalmist was, after that moment, compelled to sing a new song. He couldn't go back; he had to tell others what God had done in that moment. And by telling them and sharing the story, he has helped numerous people trust in God.

The psalmist proclaims that God does not withhold anything from us. That God is steadfast and loves us. To witness and to share our own stories of faith about how God is working in our lives truly can inspire others. What we need to remember is that it's not our place to tell people what to believe and what to do, but to let God inspire others by simply sharing what our experience has been.

Jesus didn't come on earth to tell John how to baptize. If we think about the story of baptism, he came to let John baptize him, and that's when God's Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove. Jesus didn't randomly choose a fisherman and then tell that person, like Peter, "Okay, here's how you teach people about God." Jesus came on earth first

¹ Carmen Nanko-Fernandez, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 1, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 248.

as a child. Jesus then came to serve, and in this passage from John, Jesus invites us to come and see. The new song that God has us singing is this: "Come and see. Come and see what God is doing in our midst. What God is doing in the world." In order to come and see, though, we must move through our fears. Be released from our anxiety. Our anxiety of failing; our anxiety of disappointing others or ourselves. If we trust in God and believe that God will provide us with what we need to move forward, no matter what we get ourselves into...no matter what bog, tumult, whatever it is we're facing, God will be there to help us.

This past week in *Still Spirited*, I wrote about the effects of anxiety. That one of the things that the author listed was that when we are anxious, we replace curiosity with a demand for certainty. Or we stiffen our own position over against another's. Jesus has come to lift our burdens and to release our fears, to relieve our anxieties. Jesus piques the disciples' curiosity, invites us to be open to new possibilities, to come and see what is about to happen. Jesus draws our attention to caring for all of Creation. And Jesus calls us to serve.

What we learn and discover in these passages is that God does not withhold anything from us. God offers us unconditional love. God offers us forgiveness. And God offers us a path: a new path. All that is required – we don't have to do burnt offerings or sacrifices. We simply need to trust in God.

There is a new song that I have heard, and it's written by a dear colleague of mine named Christopher Giffen. And I hear the possibilities and the new opportunities in this song, and I'm going to just share the first bit of it with you. He says:

"I heard God's voice in your voice. When you spoke after the silence, there was peace. I was drawn and held and opened. In the words that you had spoken, I am broken now but known in your grace. If we listen, we might hear the voice of truth, and we might touch the heart of love. We might find the trace of beauty in our lives. And we'll know that we can stand upon this ground and trust a depth of love surrounds. Even this brokenness we've found."

Trust in God. Come and see. For God is doing things beyond our imagination, and we are called to be a part of it. And for that, we give God thanks. Amen.