

Restored to Life
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First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
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Psalm 30

- ¹ I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up,
and did not let my foes rejoice over me.
- ² O Lord my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have healed me.
- ³ O Lord, you brought up my soul from Sheol,
restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.
- ⁴ Sing praises to the Lord, O you God's faithful ones,
and give thanks to God's holy name.
- ⁵ For God's anger is but for a moment;
God's favor is for a lifetime.
Weeping may linger for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.
- ⁶ As for me, I said in my prosperity,
'I shall never be moved.'
- ⁷ By your favor, O Lord,
you had established me as a strong mountain;
you hid your face;
I was dismayed.
- ⁸ To you, O Lord, I cried,
and to the Lord I made supplication:
- ⁹ 'What profit is there in my death,
if I go down to the Pit?
Will the dust praise you?
Will it tell of your faithfulness?
- ¹⁰ Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me!
O Lord, be my helper!'
- ¹¹ You have turned my mourning into dancing;
you have taken off my sackcloth
and clothed me with joy,
- ¹² so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.
O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you for ever.

"O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me." The psalmist, in referencing Sheol and the Pit, is speaking very specifically of a near-death experience. "O Lord, you brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit." We could leave this at a literal level, a nearly fatal event, but that would deny the depth of meaning and truth this psalm proclaims. This week The Caring Place hosted a breakfast for its volunteers and, in preparing for the

prayer before the breakfast, I thought about what the volunteers do when they give their time. They make life more abundant for those they encounter. Thus, abundant life has been on my mind in a variety of expressions and I think life abundant is part of the depth of this psalm.

Jesus said, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”¹ His life and his ministry were about bringing people closer to wholeness, honoring them exactly as they were, not despite who they were. “O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me.” Living an abundant life is to experience wholeness, and living an abundant life is something we are **all** living into. You who sit among us with the wisdom of years know this – as we grow, we grow to temper who our families think we should be, who society wants us to be, who others think we should be, in favor of being who we are, without apology. I have heard this affirmed by so many of you. Our wholeness does not, and never will, come from others’ restrictions but always comes from God’s freedoms.

You may have realized by now that I live in a self-proclaimed geeky household. As such, I knew exactly what he meant when actor Simon Pegg said, “Being a geek is all about being honest about what you enjoy and not being afraid to demonstrate that affection. It means never having to play it cool about how much you like something...Being a geek is extremely liberating.”² This is a snapshot of an angle of abundant life, which hints at a wholeness. Allow me to reassemble that quote for broader effect: “Being honest about what you enjoy and not being afraid to demonstrate that affection is extremely liberating.” Every time we pretend not to be who we are, every time we deny what we are passionate about, our lives become a little darker.

Musician Kurt Cobain said it this way: “Wanting to be someone else is a waste of the person you are.”³ Being someone you are not casts a darkness. Our psalm declares, “Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.” We who have lived this life know that very little is resolved in the passing from night to day and I do not think the psalmist was making this suggestion. Instead, the night is darkness and morning is a lessening of that darkness. When we bring that darkness upon ourselves, the psalmist’s question to God turns back to ourselves: What profit is there in your death? Indeed, what profit is there in not being who and how God formed us? Does the profit of living as others think we should outweigh the profit of holy wholeness? If we answer “No,” with the psalmist let us cry to God for help so we might have God heal us, so we might live and abundantly.

It might seem awfully bold of the psalmist to say to God, “What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?” but it’s important to know that the faithful psalmist was, not uncommonly, recognizing that there were so many other gods

¹ John 10:10.

² http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0670408/bio?ref_=nm_dyk_qt_sm#quotes

³ http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/k/kurt_cobain.html

being worshipped that one who worshipped the one God meant one less person worshipping another god misguidedly. That topic is a conversation starter for another day so, rather than go there, let me instead share yet an additional way of hearing what the psalmist was saying. Professor Steven Bishop writes, “it is as likely, if not more so, that it is an appeal to the created purpose of humans. While we live we may praise God, for that is why we are created; we live to give God worship.”⁴

The more abundantly we live, the more our energies are freed to give God worship. Of course, I recognize that living less-than-whole is not our only deterrent to being abundantly alive. There are other kinds of darkness, other things that keep us from life abundant, other detractors over which we cannot effect agency. There are troubles for which we weep, there is mourning, there is a time for sackcloth. As we endure them, we trust they will not endure because it is only God’s goodness which endures. We have faith that God turns mourning into dancing and changes our clothes from the sackcloths of grief and sorrow to clothes of joy.

In the depth of our troubles, the ones from which we can have effect our own freedom and the ones from which we cannot, it is not unnatural to struggle to hope, to forget the impermanence of all but God’s goodness. The psalmist’s words can be read and understood as an individual’s and not incorrectly but, again, there is more depth of meaning and truth in these psalms. In a way we, today and here, cannot fully comprehend, the individual of ancient Israel could not be separated from the community of Israel. While we may not fully comprehend it, that connectedness of community, even if in a slighter form in our modern day, holds us each in our not-quite-wholeness and, when we cannot yet, still proclaims the permanence of hope and God’s goodness.

As Pastor Chandler Brown Stokes describes, “Such a community could find ways to sing and read the psalm with great integrity, celebrating the healing of those who are joyful and embracing the sorrow of those who still weep, knowing that God is present to each and to the whole in all these modes – God the consoling Spirit in sorrow, God the glad recipient of the people’s gratitude, God whose favor is for a lifetime, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health...God whom we would thank forever.”⁵ The holy wholeness we seek as individuals is just as possible for us as a community. Whether it be a community of faith here in downtown Waukesha or a community of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) or the community of our nation, our community becomes more whole as we each become more wholly as God formed us, for God also formed us to be whole as community which relies on our wholeness and abundance as individual members of the body. The more abundantly we as community live, the more **our** energies are freed to give God worship. So may it be for you and for me.

⁴ *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 3*, p.181.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

Let us pray: O Lord our God, we cry to you for help, that we might be restored to wholeness. You are always and in every way deserving of our praise and thanks forever so we give our praise and thanks this day. Amen.