

A Song of Glad Deliverance (Psalm 32)
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First Baptist Church, Jefferson City MO
The Fourth Sunday in Lent (Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11)
March 27, 2022

WATCH/LISTEN: www.fbcjc.org/sermon/a-song-of-glad-deliverance

Psalm 32¹ A David *maskil*²

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah Therefore, let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them. You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. Selah I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you. Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD. Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.



All of us live under the shadow of our culpability, masked by our denial of the true state of things. We live in an illusion about what we've done. Maturity is the process by which we shed these illusions and move toward a more realistic view of ourselves. And no illusion is more persistent than our illusion of innocence.

Our feigned illusion of innocence is what derails our attempts to find home and community. Those of us who live this side of Eden must surrender our claims to innocence so we can find our true home among the community of the lost and broken where reconciliation may be found.

Before Saint Augustine was a saint, he was a mess.³ When we think of Augustine's rampant sexual promiscuity as a young man growing up in North Africa, he had a sexual history author

¹ New Revised Standard Version of the Bible

² Some psalms are called "maskil" (maschil), meaning "enlightened" or "wise", because they impart wisdom

William Styron might describe as a “headlong rush toward carnal oblivion.”⁴ Augustine agonized over his remorse for his wasted years scarred by his guilt. And as he struggled with these things and longed to know himself as truthfully as possible, he reported, “I was admonished to return to my own self...” Some wise soul (perhaps his spiritual guide Ambrose?) directed him to look deep inside himself so he could see himself as completely as he could.

I read a while back that Augustine had taken this Psalm and had it inscribed above his bed so it would be the first thing he saw every morning.

*Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.
Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit ...
(Psalm 32:1-2, NRSV)*

Richard Rohr, a native Kansan who has become a well-known Franciscan writer on spirituality and formation, says ultimately there is no knowledge of self that doesn't lead to a knowledge of God. Likewise, there is no knowledge of God that doesn't lead to a knowledge of self. Likely Rohr had read Thomas Merton who said: “If I find Him I will find myself and if I find my true self I will find Him.”

When Augustine said, “I was admonished to return to my own self...” maybe what he was suggesting was God is closer to me than I am to myself. Psalm 32 is known to be a part of the traditional listing of the seven penitent psalms. It's a psalm of thanksgiving offered by individuals after the forgiveness of sin and the experience of healing.

In Brueggemann's study of the Psalms, he constructed a three-part pattern of how God works in the world. First there is a time of orientation. The psalms sing the songs of creation and of God's glory and power in making the world. These orientation psalms speak grandly of God's world and of the wonder about the making of human beings, male and female.

But there's a second group of psalms that describe a time of disorientation. These are the songs that are sung in sadness and disarray. They are mournful as they describe the days of lament of personal wrongdoing or of those days when the people of God were disobedient to God's laws.

³ Thanks to Burt Burleson, Chaplain at Baylor University for the insights of his sermon, “We're a Mess,” preached at DaySpring Baptist Church, Waco TX, 7/22/07

⁴ Styron's phrase to describe Sophie's disintegration into guilt and shame that led her to return to her abusive lover Nathan (*Sophie's Choice*).

Finally, there is a third group of psalms dedicated to the time of re-orientation. These are the songs of surprise and celebration at the restoration God has brought to the unfaithfulness of the man or woman of God. These are hymns and songs of thanksgiving offered up to God for doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

These are the days of re-orientation when David the psalmist can see what a mess he has made of himself and how he has gone before God confessing his sin. After his contrition has been offered, to his utter surprise he discovers he has been granted a reprieve by forgiveness. In that great and boundless joy, he can say: *Thou art my hiding place; Thou dost preserve me from trouble; Thou dost surround me with glad songs of deliverance.*

In this season of Lent, our worship will focus on our interior world described by the psalms. Recognizing the psalms are in their essence ancient poetry, here's a poem from our own time as a way to allow the poets of then and the poets of now to carry on a conversation we can overhear in our own time.

When Someone Deeply Listens to You

John Fox

i

When someone deeply listens to you
it is like holding out a dented cup
you've had since childhood
and watching it fill up with
cold, fresh water.
When it balances on top of the brim,
you are understood.
When it overflows and touches your skin,
you are loved.

ii

When someone deeply listens to you
the room where you stay
starts a new life
and the place where you wrote
your first poem
begins to glow in your mind's eye.
It is as if gold has been discovered!

When someone deeply listens to you
your bare feet are on the earth
and a beloved land that seemed distant
is now at home within you.⁵

The purpose of Lenten discipline is a self-examination that guides us to consider greater conformity to the mind and vision of God to adopt a more effective ministry for the world. In the theme of the shadows of Lent, we are invited into a dialogue exploring our inner being.

Help us, O God, as we seek our reorientation in you.

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⁵ John Fox, *When Jewels Sing*, Palo Alto: Open Heart Publications, 1989