

Sermon #242
Psalm 55, 1 Peter 5:6,7
August 19, 2018
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“Crying Out Loud”

It was a moment that no parent wants to live through. It makes a good story, but no one wants to experience it. When our children were small, Robert got an ear infection, as he often did, and Rachel took him to the doctor’s office along with little Rebecca, since there was no one to leave her with. At that age, Robert had a very low pain tolerance and a high level of fear for doctors. In order for the doctor to examine him, it actually took the nurse, Rachel, and the doctor to hold him down. The three of them wrestled with Robert while he thrashed about and screamed his lungs out. It’s a good thing that child services were not right next door. All three of them might have ended up in jail.

While Robert was at the height of his emotional disturbance, Rebecca began innocently walking around the room repeating the phrase, “I’m fine. I’m fine. I’m fine.”

The nurse took one look at her and said, “Honey, you’re the only one here who’s fine!”

Life is often like this story from our past. We often face trials of many kinds that cause us great consternation. Sometimes we encounter situations we think are unbearable. Maybe we are hurting deeply on the inside while others around us seem to be saying all the time. “I’m fine. I’m fine.” Thus, we feel even more isolated and hurt, thinking no one can help us.

Or maybe we are the ones with deep hurts inside, but outwardly we give a pretense that all is well. Inwardly we grieve deeply, but outwardly we say, “I’m fine. I’m fine.” We put on masks that tell everyone that all is well even though the hurt inside wells up even deeper. And if we often do that with others, it’s quite possible we do the same with God. Instead of crying out loud to God, we hold our hurts, fears, and disappointments deep inside.

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The psalmist was not one to hide his fears from God or others. In psalm 55, what could be called a song of lament, the psalmist cries out to God from the very depths of his soul. He calls from a place of deep despair and anguish. He was practically “crying out loud” in his prayer. And that’s what it is, a prayer that was put to song and later sung by many people in similar situations. Could we learn from this psalm how to express our own fears and anxieties? And even more importantly, what might we learn about God? This Sunday as we continue in our sermon series on grace, we, like the psalmist want to know if it is possible to find grace in our times of deepest despair and anguish.

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I. Express your deepest fears to God. We can “cry out” to him.

A. How the psalmist cried out to him (vv. 1-15).

The psalmist, who was probably David, certainly describes a very painful moment in his life. If it was David, as the title suggests, he certainly had his times of great grief and fear. King Saul pursued him relentlessly, trying to take his life. Later his own son, Absalom, would rebel against him. Yes, David was a man very acquainted with deep grief and distress. So, in this psalm, whatever the particular situation, he begins by calling on his God. “Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my plea; hear me and answer me” (v. 1). So right away, we get the sense of urgency in his voice. “God, come to my rescue,” he urgently pleads.

He follows his urgent plea with many descriptive words, expressing how he feels. “My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught,” he says in verse 2. “My heart is in anguish with me; the terrors of death have fallen on me. Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me” he admits in verse 4 and 5. And it all has to do with his enemy and the threats of the wicked (v. 3).

Oh, how he longs to get away from all of this. “Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest” (v. 6). The psalmist appears to be like those TV commercials for Southwest Airlines. Something goes wrong with the lead person – the referee, the business person, the parent has a bad day and the announcer’s voice comes on strongly, “So, you want to get away?” That’s David’s cry here. “I want to get away, Lord! I can’t take it anymore!” Too bad Southwest Airlines didn’t exist for him at that time.

The psalmist even cries out for God to do something. “Confuse the wicked,” he says, “confound their words, for I see violence and strife in the city” (v. 9). This is like the prophet Habakkuk, who saw the violence and injustice of his time and cried out to God. “How long, oh Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?” “How long” (Hab. 1:2)? Moses, after reluctantly answering God’s call to rescue his people, also faced rejection from Pharaoh and cried out to God, “Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? Is this why you sent me” (Exodus 5:22)?

B. How we can cry out to God. What are you afraid of today?

If you have cried out to the Lord in similar ways, then you and I are in good company today. From Moses to David to Habakkuk and to Peter in the NT, a heart-felt cry for help and for mercy is not without precedence. Thus, you and I can approach God in the same way. We don’t have to be afraid. We don’t have to keep it inside and pretend that all is well. We don’t have to say, “I’m fine. I’m fine.” When all is not fine.

And we can learn from the psalmist and others that God is a God who is accessible. He is not far off or distant. He is not bothered by any of our petitions of

urgent need. All human beings have their limitations, but God does not. He has an open-door policy. No case is too difficult for him. No fear or anxiety is beyond his care. He is willing to hear our deepest emotions. We can say, “This is pretty crappy, God.” And he won’t turn away from us. Even in our most painful moments, he will listen.

The psalmist went on to describe a very painful, hurtful moment. “But it is you, one like myself,” he admits (v. 13). “my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship at the house of God as we walked about among the worshipers.” This seems to be the climax and his deepest hurt. It was one thing to have an enemy come against him, but a friend, a close friend with whom he had enjoyed sweet friendship and fellowship in the house of God. As Jesus would later find out, the deepest treachery of all is the betrayal of a friend. “My companion attacks his friends” the psalmist laments, “he violates his covenant.”

But despite all of these deep, impassionate expressions of hurt, the psalmist can say, “As for me, I call to God, and the Lord saves me.” Now, we begin to see that God is a God who rescues his people. He takes care of them, because he cares for them. He cares for us.

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II. Cast your fears on him.

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From deep anxiety, the psalmist is reminded what God can do. So, he says, “Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you” (v. 22). What does cast mean? but to get rid of it. Throw it away. These cares of the world will do you harm, so don’t hang on to them anymore. Throw them off. Because this God with an open-door policy will not only hear your deepest cry, but he will take care of it. He will sustain you or support you. That’s grace.

This verse reminds me of several modern-day songs that have been sung over the years:

A song from my college days says, “He didn’t bring us this far to leave us; He didn’t teach us to swim to let us drown; He didn’t build his home in us to move away; He didn’t lift us up to let us down.”

Another song has these comforting words, “No one understands like Jesus. When the days are dark and grim. No one is so near, so dear as Jesus; Cast your every care on him.”

And then there is the old favorite hymn, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” One line goes like this, “Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh what needles pain we bare, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.” We’ll sing that one as our final song this morning to remind us that we can truly cast all our cares upon a God who does care for us.

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Casting our cares on a God who cares is not only found in familiar songs and this psalm, but also in 1 Peter 5:7, that we read earlier. It's the apostle Peter's turn to proclaim the same thing. Perhaps he had this very psalm in mind when he wrote, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." There's the word "all" again. Cast it all on God because he cares for you. Throw it all off and allow him to care for you as only he can do. Isn't that great to know. We serve a God who cares, one who hears all our complaints and takes away our fears and anxieties. That's grace. No, the situation may not change. It didn't change for the prophet Habakkuk, nor right away for Moses, and perhaps not right away for David, either. But he did change his people and he took away their anxieties. And ultimately, he used them for his glory and his purposes.

The context of 1 Peter 5 is surrounded by persecution. Earlier in his letter, Peter encouraged his readers to not be surprised by fiery trials (4:12). But he called them to rejoice when they suffered for Christ (4:13). He told them to humble themselves before God so that he would lift them up in due time (5:6). And he urged them to resist the devil by standing firm against him (5:9). And through it all, they could definitely cast all their cares on God, knowing that he already cared for them even when they faced great trials (5:7). They could still count on God.

Benyamim Yusuf experienced brutal persecution for his decision to leave his religion and follow Christ. He grew up in Africa in a strict Muslim family. When he decided to become a Christian, his father disowned him and banished him from their home. He tried to escape the country but was captured and put in prison. Guards tried to beat a renunciation out of him. But he never renounced his faith in Christ. Instead, he would forgive the guards at the conclusion of every beating.

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One of the jailors befriended him because of the love he saw in Benyamim. He asked him how he could forgive the people who beat him. So, he told the guard about Jesus' love and forgiveness and later that same guard helped him to escape. Benyamim later found his way to the United States, where he earned a PhD in religious studies before returning to Africa to plant churches. Despite all the persecution, Benyamim stood firm in the Lord. He cast his cares on the Lord and was enabled to forgive his enemies and return to his place of troubles and help rescue many more people. All that because he trusted in Jesus. And that's what the palmist finally did as well. He cast his cares on a God who cared for him and he trusted in him, even when he did not see a change in his circumstances.

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III. Trust in him. (v. 23)

The last verse sums it up well. Even though the psalmist continued to see bloodshed and treachery (v 23a), he would still trust his God. He concludes this psalm by saying, "But for me? I trust in you" (v. 23b). We can conclude by saying the same thing. We will trust in our God who cares for us.

What are you afraid of today? What's been keeping you awake at night? Cast your cares, every one of them on God who cares for you. And he will sustain and keep you. Will you trust in the God who cares? Belmont UMC, will you trust in him?

As I said in the congregational meeting last week, this fall, we will be working hard and trusting in our God to build this church up by getting the word out and inviting others to church. But before we can do that, we ourselves need to be healthy. We can't carry heavy baggage with us and hope to minister effectively for God. So, let's do something this morning to lift our burdens and be the people he can help us become.

Did you wonder why I brought in a big black bag this morning and why it has been up here all morning? You might recall that I've done this before several years ago. But I thought it appropriate again today to bring my black bag back so that we can cast our cares upon God and leave them on the altar today. Let's leave them there and not pick them back up again. That's what casting means to throw them on the altar and not pick them back up again. So, let's see what we can throw on the altar of God's grace this morning and let him deal with them.

Fears, insecurities, despair, hurts, worries about family troubles, marital difficulties, children, grandchildren, financial struggles (personal or corporate), changes (the building, the staff), relational issues, giant obstacles, and miscellaneous (includes everything else). (Take out the bricks one by one, name them, then put them on the altar of grace; or have people bring them up at the end of the service.)

Conclusion

We don't have to pretend that all is right when it's not. And say, "Fine, fine" when it isn't fine. Praise God that we can cry out loud to a God who is willing to listen to all of our deep, heart-felt needs. Let us cast all our cares upon our God of grace and really trust him by leaving them on the altar.