

Psalm 130
"The Penitent Waits Patiently on the Lord"
Lenten Midweek 6

March 21, 2018
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[The Military Watchman]

Throughout the branches of the military, no one likes having to wake up at "Oh-dark-thirty," after only a few hours of sleep, to face this dark, dreary, dangerous time. If something bad happens, it often happens then, and you must raise the alarm and face the danger alone until others awaken.

If you fall asleep on watch, you're risking the lives of all your shipmates or comrades who are depending on you during that time.

You see, the watch stander longs for the dawn, when he will be relieved of the watch. And, only those who've done it, particularly while serving in harm's way, understand how lonely and worrisome this watch can be.

The Psalmist understood this. He understood so well that he repeated, *"My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchman for the morning"* (Psalm 130:6).

Yet, one does not need to have served in the military standing watch at night to understand what it means to wait for the Lord. It is true of every penitent Christian to wait patiently on the Lord.

[Diving in Sin]

Martin Luther was once asked which Psalms he liked the best. He replied, "The Pauline Psalms." When pressed as to which these are, he cited several of the Penitential Psalms, including today's Psalm — 130. Now, in stressing the sinfulness of mankind, our total dependence on God's grace and mercy, and the spiritual nature of redemption, Psalm 130 is in line with the theological insights of Paul's epistles.

Psalm 130 begins, ***“Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord!”*** (Psalm 130:1). The “depths” are not the depths of the soul, but the deep outward and inward distress of sin in which the Psalmist has sunk.

You see, all sin sinks us to a depth from which we cannot save ourselves. All sin separates us from God.

Knowledge of sin moves the Psalmist to cry out in sorrow and despair. For the Psalmist knows that self-help and positive thinking cannot rescue him out of these depths. He prays that God’s ears will be attentive to his urgent plea.

You see, all people are in this terrible and lost condition. Yet, not all people realize it.

Now, scuba diving is a sport that many people enjoy. I’ve never done it, myself. But, I know that the deeper one dives, the shorter time one can be underwater. At depths of 90 to 130 feet, the scuba diver requires special training, because excessive nitrogen can build up in that person’s bloodstream, causing nitrogen narcosis. In this state, the diver feels intoxicated and forgets to keep track of time and depth, which can lead to running out of air and drowning.

This is similar with people who don’t recognize the dangerous condition into which they’ve fallen — deep in the depths of sin — spiritually separated from God. They become intoxicated by the things of the world without seeing the danger that leads to eternal death.

For the Penitent, he does recognize this danger and cries out to God. You see, the Penitent’s guilt has plunged him into sorrow and despair over his sin.

[Tension and Longing]

Through the working of God’s Law, revealed in the Ten Commandments and written on our hearts, the Penitent acknowledges his sin and inability to save himself.

The Psalmist declares: ***“O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy! If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared”*** (Psalm 130:2-4).

You see, the Psalmist does not remain in the depths. He knows that the Lord is a forgiving God. But if God kept track of all our sins and kept them always in remembrance, then there would be no hope for any of us. We would all be dead in our sins. But, Jesus Christ has paid the ransom for our sins when He died on the cross at Calvary — and for this, God does not charge our sins against us. As the Apostle Paul writes, ***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”*** (Romans 3:23-24).

You see, with God there is forgiveness because of Christ. Jesus, God made flesh, lived a perfect life without sin, fulfilling God’s Law in every way, so that He could be the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

When Jesus died on the cross of Calvary, a great exchange took place. He took upon Himself our sin. And because He paid the price for our sin, God declared the world reconciled. Now, through faith in Jesus the Christ, God declares us forgiven and imputes to us Christ’s righteousness.

The Psalmist, who lived long before the time of Christ, believed that God would send a Savior who would bring forgiveness. And so, he confidently proclaimed: ***“But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared”*** (Psalm 130:4).

You see, the fear of God that flows from forgiveness is not terror or dread, but reverence, love, and honor for the God who forgives. This penitence and fear includes faith and is worked by the Holy Spirit through God’s Word.

The Penitent Psalmist therefore has two kinds of fear at the same time. First, fear over sin, which separates us from God and brings us to call out in terror-like fear and despair to God. The second fear is respect or awe in hope for a God who will forgive his sins for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Thus, on this side of eternity, there is always a tension and a longing within the penitent. If one does not have this tension and struggle within, then that person has succumbed to the sinful flesh of the world and Satan.

[Struggles of the Penitent]

Now, the struggles of the Penitent Christian in this life are to be seen as a blessing from God.

God blesses us throughout the painful, patient waiting of our new life in Him. He is with us during the patient waiting in His Word and Sacraments. Therein, God gives us His Word and Promise, which the Holy Spirit uses to strengthen faith and hope.

On hope and despair, Martin Luther writes: “[God’s] children must hope in despair; for fear is nothing else than the beginning of despair, and hope is the beginning of recovery. And these two things, direct opposites by nature, must be in us, because in us two natures are opposed to each other, the old man and the new man. The old man must fear, despair, and perish; the new man must hope, be raised up, and stand” (AE 14:191).

Throughout His Word of Hope, the loving Triune God pulls us out of the depths of sin and despair and raises us up. Furthermore, since Jesus was raised from the dead, God promises the ultimate deliverance for us — eternal life with Him in heaven!

With the strength God gives in His Word, the Penitent trusts God in and through the waiting. The Penitent also knows that God works even in suffering and affliction for the good of those who love Him. We also have the assurance that no matter what we face in this life, we have God’s sure Word, which assures us that nothing can separate us from His love in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39).

As Penitents, we not only pray for ourselves, but we also invite others to wait patiently in the same hope of the Lord. The Psalmist proclaims: ***“O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities”*** (Psalm 130:7-8).

Luther found that Israel in Psalm 130 is the appropriate name for the penitent people, which in Hebrew means “wrestler with God.” For he writes: “For Israel means a ‘wrestler with God.’ Now all who wait for the Lord so firmly that they wrestle with God are the true Israelites” (AE 14:193).

As wrestlers with God, we know that God’s steadfast love and redemption in Christ is for all!

As true Penitents, we confess our sin, we trust in God’s deliverance in Christ, and we wait patiently on the Lord. Amen!

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen!