

God calls us to love and care for each and every one

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Pentecost + 6b – 2 Sam 1 – Ps 130 – 2 Cor 8 – Mark 5 21-43

Our readings today take us on a journey through lament, prayer and its effect, and our thanksgiving for that; and finally, they tell us that in the costly love of Jesus, we find the assurance that all these things are part of our faith for a good reason.

Lament: our first reading was David's song of lament for Israel's first king Saul and his son Jonathan—David's beloved friend. If you read back through the story of that first royal experiment with Saul, it was a disastrous mistake. But the rebellious soldier David will now become the new king, and for all his faults, and the failings of most of his successors, he remains an inspiration to this day because of his childlike openness to the power of God's love.

So out of the depths of despair and grief, God can raise new hope; hope like David's life has inspired. And that's what today's Psalm tells us; something it's been telling people for a very long time; *trust in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy: and with him is ample redemption.* Anyone's lost-ness can be turned around – we can be found and brought back to safety.

Prayer and its effect – and that happens most astonishingly through prayer. I have a vivid image of the prayer of the Psalms that comes from my times in synagogues and particularly a time at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Many hundreds of people were praying the Psalms of the day, often rocking and weeping as they did. And then a group of young people arrived singing and banging drums and tambourines as they danced their

way to the wall. Both of them – the rocking, weeping people and the joyful young people were singing Psalms.

They could have been praying the Psalm we sang today, Ps 130; a Psalm written for when you're grieving, and which points you to the certainty of hope and joy. It's an old *Psalm of ascents*; a Psalm for people coming up to worship in Jerusalem. It's an old poem, this Psalm. The people at the Western Wall weren't praying with words they'd made up. The Psalms were made by poets like King David who first sang them more than 3,000 years ago. The Spirit of God gave them these words to sing, and they wrote them down so that we still have them to sing now.

We believe God has given us these Psalms to sing. And when we sing them, we belong to a huge community, thousands of years old, and nearly two-and-a-half thousand million in number today.

It means that when we sing this Psalm together, we know we're sharing our worries with lots of people, and shared sadness and worry are easier to bear. It also means that with the rejoicing Psalms, we share them with all those people too, and shared joy gets bigger and bigger. And we're also praying a prayer that we know God hears, because the Spirit of God inspired it in us in the first place. It's been placed on our hearts. It's good to learn Psalms by heart like those people at the Western Wall have. Because then, wherever you are, and whatever happens, you have wonderful prayers inside you, ready to pray. You're never alone; your worries come into perspective, your joy grows; you know you are in the presence of God.

Thanksgiving – So we are grateful – obviously – but what then? Paul reminds the Corinthian church – and through them, us, that God's gifts to us have come at a considerable cost. He reminds us that Christ, *though he was rich, yet for [our] sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty [we] might become*

rich. And this is the model for us. As Christ-followers, we are called to hand on love and support even when that can involve considerable sacrifice. The redemption, the consolation, the community support that the Psalm enables for us – they're not meant to stop with us. In Jesus, we find them a model to emulate. We are called to enable those whose souls cry from *out of the depths* to know that God has heard them. In praying, we open ourselves to being the means of that prayer being answered.

And it's in the ministry of Jesus that we find all these things – lament heard, prayer heard, and thanksgiving expressed through generosity – all these are part of our faith. And today, we see it all expressed in the Gospel passage we've just shared. The exhausted Jesus we met on last week's boat in the storm still hasn't had any chance to rest and recover. Immediately upon his arrival over the other side, he had to deal with the Gerasene demoniac and his legion of unclean spirits. And upon his return today, the crowds are back, pinning him to the boat before he's even had a chance to get out. And yet among all that need, and despite his exhaustion, Jesus finds it in him to redeem two lost people; a woman who had bled for twelve years, and a twelve-year-old girl who had died.

The wonder of this is that we can proclaim a God who is not only committed to justice and mercy and faith in a generalised, in-principle way, but a God who calls us to love and care for each and every one – and particularly for those left behind; those at the margins of everyone's attention. Pray! You will be heard! ... Amen.