

Tippecanoe Presbyterian Church Message for Worship 1/15/23

**Message** “Lighting Our Way” Rev. Trish Eckert

The title of my message, “Lighting Our Way” brings to mind the ways that we seek God and God seeks us. So often we hear throughout the Bible, “Here I am, Lord.” And this morning we hear the psalmist tell us, “God inclined to me and heard my cry.” We are reminded that no matter what we are navigating, God is with us.

I must say, the first line of today’s Psalm made me chuckle: “I waited patiently for the Lord.” But who among us can with any candor say, “I waited patiently for the Lord?” When seldom wait for anything without some frustration or anxiety!

We wait in traffic, wait for things to get better, or wait in the waiting room. We are no good at waiting. We want to get moving, we can’t bear wasting time, and the clock is ticking along while we don’t know what will unfold next. Patience is listed by Paul as a “fruit of the Spirit,” which it must be for somebody, somewhere, but not me, or at least not yet. I can’t muster it; maybe a miracle will dawn.

It's interesting to me that although we hear so much praise in this text, it is actually considered a Psalm of lamentation. (And if we heard the entire psalm, it would become much more evident. Just beyond the verses that we heard this morning, the psalmist goes on, “For evils have encompassed me without number.”) Psalm 40 is a psalm of lament that starts with praise and confidence – and then moves into lament and petitions. And what’s interesting is that it seems like David begins with praise from the past in order to deal with his problems in the present. One scholar I was reading gave this psalm the title, *Past Praise Applied to Present Problems*.

This Psalm isn’t a prayer so much as a report on a prayer. In Biblical times, if you were under duress, you would pray and ask others to pray – and then later you would share what that was like, what transpired, and what God had done. If God does something good for us, can we find the words to share? This might be of help to someone else struggling, and it might even make us more solid in our sense of God’s goodness. The good that God does isn’t precisely what we might have asked for, but that is no barrier to testimony.

The Psalmist reminds us of the power of sharing our experience with others. This was certainly the case for me on Monday night when a few of us gathered on Zoom for worship. We practiced lectio Divina, which translates as “divine reading.” This is a deeply intentional way of praying with a scripture reading at the center. You prepare yourself so that you are centered and focused, and then you read the text over a number of times, going increasingly deeper into the meaning of the reading through reading, meditating, praying, and contemplating.

As our group explored Psalm 40, the rich language of the text illuminated the direct experiences of each of us as we began reflecting on our Divine Intervention ministry. Phrases in the text helped us recognize the abundance of life: “You have multiplied, O Lord my God, your wondrous deeds, and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you.” We wrestled with what it looks like and feels like to delight when doing God’s will. As we heard, “I delight to do your will, O my God” and recognized how we are uplifted when we take in the image of God’s law being written within our hearts. A reminder that everything we need is within us. We reflected on how powerful it is to hear the experiences of others and remember that when we share our stories about the times we’ve been inspired or strengthened by our connection with the divine, we are in turn, encouraging others, and lighting their way when things are challenging.

It brought up some key questions: *What are our gifts? And Are we using them in a way that brings the divine to others?*

As I carried these reflections and questions with me this week, I also turned my attention to the fact that tomorrow is day we honor the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. As I contemplated the myriad ways his ministry and leadership shaped the Civil Rights movement and so much that has unfolded in working toward equity since his assassination, I find, as so many people do, that his words remain powerful and relevant today.

When we listen to his beautiful sermons and infamous speeches, we are deeply inspired. Yet I find at times that I wonder, what did it look like for Reverend King when he was feeling low or overwhelmed or ineffective. I was touched when I came across this testimony from his autobiography. In the last two years of his leadership, as he faced criticism for his nonviolent approach, he became especially tired and discouraged. He writes, *In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had almost gone, I determined to*

*take my problem to God. My head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud. The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory.*

*“I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership; and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they, too, will falter. I am at the end of my powers, I have nothing left. I’ve come to the point where I can’t face it alone.”*

*At that moment, I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never before experienced him. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice saying:*

*“Stand up for righteousness. Stand up for truth. God will be at your side forever.”*

*Almost at once, my fears began to pass from me. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything. The outer situation remained the same, but God had given me inner calm.*

Getting a glimpse of the inner life of this profound leader and thinker, we hear familiar human responses: exhaustion, fear, uncertainty. Dr. King cried out to God and God inclined to him.

When we are vulnerable. When we name the truth of our pain, our exhaustion, our confusion – God turns toward us. The psalmist tells us, “Happy are those who make the Lord their trust.” And what powerful words we hear in this text: “Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required.” We only need recognize that we have always been known and loved, seen and heard – we are written of “in the scroll of the book it is written of me’ and God’s law is written on our hearts.

This deep knowing, this rich relationship, that is available to each and every one of us, equips us and prepares us to do what is hard, to do what feels impossible – for me, lately, so much of what I face feels impossible. Yet, each day, God intervenes – people show up, I find my ballast. I hear God’s encouragement and feel God’s presence, not only from within, but right in

front of me – in the faces of the people I am working alongside, in those we strive to serve, in what I am learning about myself. It can be such a challenging yet beautiful journey. Walking the path of our individual journeys and discerning how we feel led to work together as a community is an exciting and life-giving process.

I came across a helpful reflection written by the theology professor, Wendy M. Wright. She speaks to the ways that the Christmas story and the Christian tradition inform the way forward. She writes, *The theme of life as a journey helps us understand the movement of our lives, yet at times it also encourages us to devote more attention to reaching our destination efficiently than to savoring the path. Wisdom is born of openness to the adaptations, improvisations, and detours often required or chosen in journeys, of the capacity to delight in what we can learn along the way. We pray for vision and for strength. And in our emerging lives, we also pray to recognize that in our openness, our questions, and our encounters, Epiphany happens along the way.*

*The birth of the baby invites us into a search...at its richest the Christian life is not so much a life lived as though all the answers were given, but a life lived as though all our answers are only gateways into deeper levels of answering, which in turn lead us into mystery where all answers give way to bended knee and adoration and praise. To be a Christian means being willing to live in the part of the self where the question is born. Amen.*

## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- How willing are you to live with questions, with uncertainty, with mystery that lies beyond the answers?
- What questions and uncertainty are you living with right now in your life?
- What mystery are you discovering within yourself and beyond as you live in the part of yourself where the questions are born?