

August 7, 2011

Psalm 40:1-10

1 I waited patiently for the Lord;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.

2 He drew me up from the desolate pit,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.

3 He put a new song in my mouth,
(a song of praise to our God.)

Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the Lord.

4 Happy are those who make
the Lord their trust,
who do not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after false gods.

5 You have multiplied, O Lord my God,
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;
none can compare with you.
Were I to proclaim and tell of them,
they would be more than can be counted.

6 Sacrifice and offering you do not desire,
but you have given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering
you have not required.

7 Then I said, "Here I am;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me.

8 I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart."

9 I have told the glad news of deliverance
in the great congregation;
see, I have not restrained my lips,
as you know, O Lord.

10 I have not hidden your saving help within my heart,
I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation;
I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness
from the great congregation.

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I think about this fellow from time to time, the one who wrote this poem. I think about him especially when I am stressed, and I have had cause to be stressed lately. I try to

visualize him, dressed in the proper attire of the time and place, then I realize I don't have to do that because his message is as clear as today, as transparent as now, as real as this room, these people-- for all of us have had to wait.

Whether it has been a traffic light, a left turn on Dixie, or waiting out the interminable darkness, All of us have waited for God and have been put on hold, just like this ancient poet.

And he didn't just wait, as pious people tend to do; why sure, we wait for the Lord. Not this fellow, he waited *patiently*. He waited and waited, the verb is doubled, I suspect it is what is called in Hebrew the *infinitive absolute* which we find when we find the same verb twice in the same sentence: I ran and ran, I thought and thought, I waited and waited, which means emphasis. I didn't just run, I ran as fast as I could as far as I could and before I could catch my breath I started running again. The *infinitive absolute* is all about emphasis, intensity, and focus. This man wasn't waiting for a bus, or waiting to get a letter from his girlfriend, he was really waiting for the Lord.

And it was quiet. There wasn't even a still small voice There was no a feeling, no sense of God's presence. The poet had made his case, explained his point, said his prayer. He expected some sort of divine response-- perhaps he had reason to expect a response. Maybe he'd been in a similar place before and received a response.

He had two choices: keep waiting or forget about it. I can't argue that one choice is better than the other because it is the Spirit who is in charge here-- not you or me. We could sit for minutes, even hours, throw in the towel, and not until then receive something that we might call response.

Reminds me of so many couples you hear about trying to have a baby and decide that it's not going to happen so they decide to adopt. No sooner are the papers signed than somebody is expecting.

All I know is that this fellow's time was not without reward. The Psalmist said that,

*"He drew me up from the desolate pit,
out of the miry bog. . ."*

What's that mean? Sounds like a swamp, sounds like he's sinking, or maybe uncertain? Sounds like he needed some foundation, something on which he could stand securely. Before, while he waited, he was unsure, he walked through the mud, or worse, quicksand. He cried out to the Lord, and he waited-- patiently. And then, when he felt that he was no longer in the mud, no longer sinking; when he felt secure and instead of singing songs of grief and failure, he had a new song to sing.

He had no choice.

There are all kinds of songs aren't there? What's your song? Is it something new? Is it a

joyful, feet set solidly on the rock sort of song? Upbeat? Or is it the song of someone who does not have this secure feeling. Given the reports out of Washington and Frankfort over the last few years, nobody would blame you if you sang the sad song. Nobody would blame you if you were crying out to the Lord because that's what they are doing. It is a scary time, it is the uncertainty of a trip through a swamp and you realize you have lost the path. So we wait. And while we wait, we meditate, we think.

Maybe we wonder things like why should the Lord take notice of me when there are so many others who are worse off than I am. Is it because I am more worthy? Because I've offered more praise to God? Am I asking God for payback because I've been such a good boy? Am I the Pharisee in the parable who thanked God because he was not like other men, men who cheated on their wives and stole and lied and killed. Am I that man? Or am I like the tax collector who stood farther down the wall praying, "Lord be merciful to me a sinner." Jesus taught us that of the two men who went out to pray, the second man, the disreputable bartender, who would be justified before God.

It's not that we are such bad people, it's just that we're not as good as we think we are, because so much of what we do wrong is not because we do bad things, but because we do nothing at all.

Or did we believe that we are the only ones who are waiting. Did it ever occur to you that perhaps the Lord is waiting patiently for us? Maybe God's psalm begins with the words, "I waited patiently for my people. . ."

It's my complaint about all of these wars we find ourselves fighting. In the first place, only a small percentage of our country is really affected by these wars. What are the rest of us doing? In the second place, we're doing all of the heavy lifting to rid foreign countries of oppressive regimes and we're getting the criticism. People act like we're the bad guys; as if it's OK to allow these Hitler wannabes all over the world to enslave their people, and then blame the people for not starting the revolution. How many of us have the first clue what it's like to live in Afghanistan under the Taliban, or Iraq under Hussein, or Libya under Ghadafi, Egypt under Mubarak or Syria under Assad. The cold war is over, we don't have to support these bums any more, it's time for them to shape up or get out.

Or maybe its better to wait. As long as I'm slopping around in the swamp, nobody can blame me for my inactivity, after all, I have to get out of this "miry bog" before I can do any good. Maybe the miry bog is our apathy. We've got these TV remotes. If things get too uncomfortable all we have to do is change the channel, don't even have to get up anymore, just push the button.

Because just as soon as we get it together, as soon as we find our feet upon a rock and find that our steps are secure, something might be expected of us. Remember what Jesus taught, *"From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded."* And the new song in our mouths is the beginning of a new way of worship.

The new way of worship is not confined or smothered. It is not left behind when the service has ended, it goes forth in the hearts and heads, the arms and legs of those who celebrated their belief in close companionship with old and new friends. The words stamped on our coins are no longer to be the subject of a cynical sneer, because the worship never ends and our trust in God impels us to act in justice and mercy, compassion and love among ourselves and to all other people both near and far away.

That trust puts a spring in our step and a smile on our faces. We remember what God has done, is doing, for us regretting only that we can't think of all our blessings, regretting that if we could, we would hardly have the time to share them all.

The new worship demands sacrifice, but its that Romans 12 sacrifice that Paul wrote about, it's that living sacrifice. Where did we ever get the idea that God enjoyed the smell of dead animals or incense? The sacrifice must be us; it's always been that way and nothing has changed.

And the least we can do is to tell what the Lord has done for us; and what the Lord is doing for us. No, sorry, we're not ready to storm the Bastille, but we are ready to share the story of our faith so that others may be enriched with our story and us with theirs, and in that bonding find that the common ground really lies upon a rock and on that rock we find we can step securely into a world of doubt and shame and cruelty like light, and love.