

The Book of Psalms is a book of poetry, which was used as the “prayer” of “service” book in the ancient Israelite Temple. Composed of 150 poems, Rev. Eugene Peterson writes that, they form are a “prayer book that gives us a language adequate for responding to the God who speaks to us.” They can teach us how to pray. Psalm 40 is a prayer of both thanksgiving and lament. It’s unusual as most lament psalms begin with the complaint followed by thanksgiving. But here in Psalm 40 thanksgiving and its outcome (vv. 1-10) precede the complaint against God and petition for divine help (vv. 11-17). The initial thanksgiving is for some past, unspecified lament. It serves as a foundation for a further complaint revealing that the way of faith does not just flow in one direction – lament to thanksgiving. The waiting of the psalmist, and that waiting which we often know in life, is not always smooth, easy or ‘patient’. It has its own ups and downs, its own reversals. And yet....God brings us from the pit, puts our feet on solid ground and gives us a new song to sing.

The psalmist poet seems to have been delivered from the very real threat of death, presumably from a disease or illness. And now – independently, or maybe it’s related – the poet is surrounded by evils portrayed as wild dogs and animals circling for the kill. How does this psalm speak to the rhythms of life and faith that we have experienced or are walking through now? How does it portray the places in which we know pain and joy, hope and despair, trusting in God in both doubt and in faith. How might this psalm provide us with the language we need to pray and live from a place of faith, whether we are in the pit, or standing on solid ground?

Look at the link between remembering God’s deliverance and telling others about it? What is the intersection between personal faith and communal worship? How have you experienced that in your own life?

your steadfast love and your faithfulness : the two forces or attributes of God are portrayed as helpers who save the psalmist from dangers. The delivering power of such a divine dynamic duo is spoken is also spoken of in:

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.”
- Psalm 23:6

and

“May integrity and uprightness preserve me,
for I wait for you.”
- Psalm 25:21

SCRIPTURES FOR

SUNDAY 8.13.2017

Psalm 40

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Thanksgiving for Deliverance and Prayer for Help

To the leader. Of David. A Psalm.

- ¹ I waited patiently for Yahweh;
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 Yahweh.
- 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, Yahweh, 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;

Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

***What strikes or shimmers for you in this passage?**

***When have you heard this psalm before? What do you think the Psalm is saying?**

***How / when have you felt trapped in a pit?**

***How have you experienced “waiting” for God in your own life? When? How did it happen, and/or end up?**

*** What does psalm 139 say to you about your own difficulties, and the hard times you go through?**

***How does this psalm feed your soul?**

***How has God put a new song in your heart? How has God moved you from thanksgiving for God’s deliverance and help to a paying-it-forward proclamation of God’s goodness?**

***Share your story of deliverance and complaint (or petition of God) with someone else. How do you react to your story as you re-tell it aloud to someone else?**

see, I have not restrained my lips,

as you know, O Yahweh.

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.

¹¹ Do not, O Yahweh, withhold

your mercy from me;

let your steadfast love and your faithfulness

keep me safe forever.

¹² For evils have encompassed me without number;

my iniquities have overtaken me,

until I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head,

and my heart fails me.

¹³ Be pleased, O Yahweh, to deliver me;

O Yahweh, make haste to help me.

¹⁴ Let all those be put to shame and confusion

who seek to snatch away my life;

let those be turned back and brought to dishonor

who desire my hurt.

¹⁵ Let those be appalled because of their shame

who say to me, “Aha, Aha!”

¹⁶ But may all who seek you

rejoice and be glad in you;

may those who love your salvation

say continually, “Great is Yahweh!”

¹⁷ As for me, I am poor and needy,

but Yahweh takes thought for me.

You are my help and my deliverer;

do not delay, O my God.