

August 25, 2019
Rev. Kerry Smith

Psalm 40:1-11 Backpack Impact
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Psalm 40:1-11

I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. 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. Happy are those who make the Lord their trust, who do not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods. 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. Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, "Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; see, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O Lord. 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. Do not, O Lord, withhold your mercy from me; let your steadfast love and your faithfulness keep me safe forever.

A few days ago, I woke up in the middle of the night and I had no covers. I looked down at the bottom of the bed and they had gotten untucked at the bottom of the bed! I could have just tucked them in again, but it had been a while since I had washed the sheets. So, the next morning, I took the sheets off the bed, washed them, and tucked them in at the bottom. Sometimes you need to get everything lined up right and start fresh. We are in this time of new beginnings as school starts again. It is an opportunity to reset. I have brought some things in my backpack each week, things that help me remember the impact that I can make in this new beginning. Things that help me remember who I am and whose I am. Things that help me remember that I am God's beloved child and that I am loved by God. I brought my journal that has quotations and Bible verses that inspire me and keep me focused on God and on God's call on my life to love God and love my neighbor.

I brought my cell phone. It is so easy to withdraw from the world with our cell phones. We don't want to acknowledge our feelings so we avoid our feelings by connecting only with our phones. We feel uncomfortable with silence and being still. Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still and know that I am God." It is so easy for us to fill the silence in our world with clutter. When we realize that something in our life is taking us away from God, we need courage to have the discipline to stop. We need the courage to choose a different way when necessary. God is telling us to slow down, to pay attention, to be present, to have courage, to have compassion, and to connect with other people.

The last thing in my backpack is a clock that has a second hand that you can see and hear. Have you ever slowed down enough to feel the second hand of the clock ticking? This week I was listening to Kate Bowler's podcast, Everything Happens, and she shared a story about being on a very important phone call when her five year old son came to her and whispered in her ear, "Is now a good time to talk about lizards?" It should always be a good time to talk about lizards!

We have a seize the day, *carpe diem*, go get 'em tiger world.¹ I want to encourage us to stop flying by at the speed of anxiety and deadlines and exhaustion. I want to encourage us to tune into God's time. God's time is gentle, generous, and moves at the speed of love. When we are following God's time, there is always enough time to sit down, to draw breath, and to look more deeply into the eyes of people we are lucky enough to love.

How can we live our lives so that we are saying to one another, from one human to another, I'm here with you. Have you heard of casserole illnesses? There are some things that

¹ <https://katebowler.com/podcasts/john-swinton-the-speed-of-love/>

happen in our lives that inspire people to make us a casserole. When we have a new baby or a family member dies. But, there is a stigma around certain things in our lives that when they happen, people aren't prompted to make a casserole. There is secrecy and shame around certain things in our lives. But, everyone has a story. You might have a family member who suffers with bipolar, or a cousin who suffers with substance use. It is important for us to remember that addiction is a disease and not a moral failing.²

We have this can-do spirit where we think that everything can always be overcome, but sometimes we are suffering and we are sad. We can't try harder or pray more or magically get better. That is why I love the Psalms so much, you can hear the anguish of the people praying these words and singing these songs. They are songs of despair and lament.

We think that if we have faith, we should be happy. Do you remember that kids song, "I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart. Where? Down in my heart and I'm so happy, so very happy. I have the love of Jesus in my heart." People come to church and they think everyone should just be happy. Just be happy, like it has never occurred to you. You can't just be happy when you are in the midst of depression. It takes your joy and your hope. It gives you laser focus on the brokenness in your life. Depression keeps you in that cycle of sadness and loneliness. Mental health issues are not something that we do and get through on our own. Even though Psalm 40 says that God drew me up from the desolate pit, there is depression and mental illness so severe that we cannot pull ourselves out.

There is this stigma that often keeps people from saying, I have a problem, I need help. We worry that if we admit something that it might make it worse. Or if we say something about what is going on, we will have to admit that we are stuck in something that is now controlling us. But, we can lower that stigma by sharing the story of our connection. There is no us versus them. We are all crying out to God saying that we need help. We have hardened ourselves against so many people. We reject the homeless or those struggling with addiction or mental health issues. When you see a clock, I want you to notice the second hand. May it remind you to slow down and listen. To be more compassionate towards people dealing with addiction, more compassionate towards people struggling with mental health issues.

We know that one in five people will be impacted by personal experiences of mental health challenges in any given year. Depression, anxiety, and other mental health challenges are common, and we cannot stay silent about this kind of suffering because it impacts our lives, our families, and our communities. In this place there is no fear of being judged or rejected. Mental illness often makes it harder for us to be confident in God's love because of the ways it damages our self-esteem. Unconditional love seems unfathomable.

In this community of faith, you are not alone. How do we as a community love on people so that we can get rid of the stigma of mental health? Some of it is based on shame. We need to get rid of shame because this affects all people. God comes into our brokenness and surrounds us and is with us. We are in this together. This is a safe place and we want to come alongside you and love you through all of this.

We belong to one another and we can ease each other's suffering because here we have community, here we have connection. All of us are suffering in some way or another. That makes us human, that makes us real. I love that in Psalm 40, the singer says that they have told the glad news of their deliverance in the great congregation. They told other people that they were making it through, they lifted other people up, just as they had been lifted up.

² <https://katebowler.com/podcasts/john-swinton-the-speed-of-love/>

Reading the Psalms gives me hope. Hope isn't naïve. Hope requires us to believe in a better day even when this one is falling apart. Hope looks the 24 hour news cycle in the face, hope looks our broken relationships in the face, hope looks our low self-esteem in the face, and declares at low tide that the water will return. Hope is exhaling, trusting that our bodies will inhale again. Hope is planting seeds in the winter, assuming summer will come.³ May we carry on with the kind of hope that can't and won't wait. Amen.

³ Excerpt from Sarah Are, Advent 2019 poetry for What can wait sermon series from <https://sanctifiedart.org>