

**New St. James Presbyterian Church
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, July 6, 2025**

**“Joy Comes with the Morning”
Psalm 30**

The Rev. Dr. David Clark

Our Responsive Psalm this morning is a prayer of thanksgiving: the psalmist is expressing gratitude, offering thanksgiving to God. For what? For rescue. And so, in this prayer, the psalmist tells and retells their story, their testimony—of distress then rescue, of death then life. And as we explore this story, I think we will find that it’s not only a story about God rescuing the psalmist; it’s also an invitation to find ourselves, today, in this same story of rescue and thanksgiving (cf. Kelsey).

The start of the psalm tells the psalmist’s story in miniature:

“I will extol you, O LORD,
for you have drawn me up” (v. 1).

That is the psalmist’s story in nutshell: I will praise you, Lord, because you picked me up; “I will lift You up, O Lord, for You have lifted me up” (NLV).

So what was it that the psalmist was rescued from? As it often is in the Psalms, we’re not told the exact details—but we get glimpses of why the psalmist needed be rescued.

The psalmist prays to God:

You “did not let *my* foes rejoice over me.

O LORD my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have *healed me*.

O LORD, you brought up my soul *from Sheol*,
restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit” (vv. 1-3).

We learn that God rescued the psalmist from not one—but several—threats. The psalmist had been threatened by “foes”—bullies, enemies, attackers. The psalmist had been threatened by illness, needing to be “healed.” And whether caused by enemies or illness or both—the psalmist had been facing death: this talk of “Sheol” and “the Pit”; in the psalms, this is the language of death.

And notice, the psalmist tells of God “br[inging] up [his] soul from Sheol,” from that place of death. You could say the psalmist had ‘one foot in the grave’: the psalmist “[d]escribe[s] [...] feeling dead while still alive” (Petersen); the psalmist had felt half-dead. And you know, in our worst moments, I think we get what that can be like; when

we're threatened or frightened, we get what it feels like to be "down in the Pit" (Kelsey).

Now when the psalmist was in this terrible state—threatened by enemies, threatened by illness, feeling halfway to death—what did the psalmist do? Well, we learn exactly what the psalmist did—and even what the psalmist said—at that lowest moment of desperation. And this is something really amazing in our psalm: our psalm is a prayer, right—a prayer of thanksgiving; but inside that prayer, embedded within that prayer, the psalmist recites their own past prayer from that rock-bottom moment. Does that make sense? This is a prayer—that also quotes an earlier prayer.

So in our psalm, the psalmist prays to God and also recalls this previous prayer, saying: "To you, O LORD, I cried,
and to the LORD I made supplication
[and here comes the quoted prayer, saying]:
'What profit is there in my death,
if I go down to the Pit?
Will the dust praise you?
Will it tell of your faithfulness?
Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me!
O LORD, be my helper!'" (vv. 8-10).

The way the psalmist thought about death, and the way we in the church think about death—it's different, in some ways. We look toward eternal life, past death, as unending praise—joining our voices to the heavenly choir, as it were. But it seems that the psalmist thought of death as involving a kind of silence: not praise, but silence. And amazingly—as the psalmist faced enemies and illness and death—this was the psalmist's primary concern: that if the psalmist were to die, then they could no longer praise God.

This is why we need to pray the Psalms, right; because we don't find prayers like this anywhere else (and we certainly wouldn't come up with this on our own). This is amazing: the psalmist isn't praying, "Save me, God, or else I'll die"; no, the psalmist is praying, "Save me, God, or else my praise will fall silent." So yes, the psalmist is praying for rescue—asking God to rescue, save, deliver... But for the psalmist—who is a model of faithful devotion to God—for the psalmist, being rescued isn't enough; the psalmist desires not only rescue, but the praise to God that comes next.

And this teaches us what real deliverance looks like: for the psalmist, God's rescue isn't complete, God's deliverance isn't finished, God's salvation isn't fulfilled—until the one rescued responds with praise (cf. Mays). And that's precisely how our psalm concludes:

it doesn't end with the psalmist being rescued; it ends with the psalmist responding with praise:

“You have turned my mourning into dancing;
you have taken off my sackcloth
and clothed me with joy,
so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.
O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever” (vv. 11-12).

As I said before: this psalm, this prayer of thanksgiving, it tells the psalmist's story—but it also invites us to find ourselves, to locate ourselves, to discover ourselves, within this same story. And here's how that can take shape for us. The way the psalmist tells this story, it's not tidy; it's not a simple, cut-and-dried account of rescue; in fact, this isn't even sequential or chronological, as the psalmist tells the story out of order. And all that makes this story feel more real, more relatable, more like us.

Think about the times when we've prayed to God, when we've sought God's strength and guidance and help. Does that story usually go: 'Thing were bad, I prayed to God, everything got fixed, the end'? No, of course not; life's messy, complicated, uneven. We often recognize God's grace in our lives not at the time, but afterward—looking back, seeing how what seemed like happenstance turned out to be providence. And that's just what we find in this psalm: it's amid the messiness of life that the psalmist, looking back, sees the rescue of a gracious God.

The Rev. Cathie Kelsey, a Methodist minister, explains how this psalm helps us reflect on our own experiences in the context of faith—because, right now, we are all somewhere in the psalmist's story of death, rescue, and praise. She writes: “The psalm refers to rejoicing, crying for help, thanksgiving, anger, weeping, joy, pride, hiding, dismay, supplication, praise, mourning, and dancing for joy. These move back and forth between celebration and desperation, [between] danger and help. The psalm never stays long in either, reflecting the ambiguity of [...] life. ‘Where am I now, *really*?’ [we can] ask. Is this a time of despair or of joy?” She adds: “The psalm invites individuals and communities [...] to attend to where we are at this moment.”

So where are we in this story? Maybe you're going through a struggle—and I'm your minister, I know some of you are struggling. And if you are—if you're down in what the psalmist called the Pit—then our psalm teaches that the Pit is the very place where God's grace and kindness can be revealed.

Or maybe whatever the Pit was for you—maybe you've been rescued from that. You were struggling, threatened, anxious; but now—now you're in a better place. God's faithfulness to you was revealed unexpectedly, maybe subtly, but unmistakably. And if

that's where you are—then our psalmist teaches that you are in a place meant for praise—that this is the time not to forget God's grace, but to recognize with thanksgiving that God lifted you up.

Or maybe—and this is probably a lot of us—maybe you're somewhere in between. You know your struggles and you know how God has helped you—and you're somewhere in the middle, not quite in the Pit but not quite out. And if that's where you are—somewhere in the messy centre of this psalm—then you need to hear the psalmist's hard-won hope, hope that comes from the faithfulness of God:

“Sing praises to the LORD, O you his faithful ones,

and give thanks to his holy name.

For his anger is but for a moment;

his favour is for a lifetime.

Weeping may linger for the night,

but joy comes with the morning” (vv. 4-5).

“[[J]oy comes with the morning”: taken by itself, apart from the grace of God, that would just be hollow optimism—just some look-on-the-bright-side-it'll-be-okay kind of wishful thinking. But this isn't that. This is a confession of faith, that no matter where we are in this story—struggling or rescued or somewhere in between—the one single solitary constant is the grace of a faithful God, who promises us—wherever we are—who promises us, that “[w]eeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.” Amen.