

Sermon, March 26, 2023

Psalm 130
"Waiting for God"

One of my favorite plays is "Waiting for Godot", by Samuel Beckett. I've read it a few times and seen a couple of productions of it. The primary characters in the play are two down and out men named Estragon and Vladimir. (It is generally believed that Beckett modeled them on Laurel and Hardy, who he admired.) Later, they are joined by two other characters named Pozzo and Lucky. The entire production takes place in a barren landscape, with a single tree beside which Estragon and Vladimir are waiting for someone named Godot. We are never told just who Godot is, nor why they are waiting for him, and in the end, Godot never shows up. There has always been speculation on who he is - some considering he symbolizes God - but Beckett insisted that it was just someone named Godot. However, the play is loaded with metaphors leaving us to interpret them.

None-the-less, if looked at from a religious point of view it does speak to the ways in which we may find ourselves waiting for God, in the sense of hoping for divine intervention in our personal lives and beyond.

In Psalm 130 we find someone crying out from the depths of his soul, asking, and waiting for forgiveness. In the final verses he switches to seeking forgiveness for Israel itself. He acknowledges in verse 4 that there is forgiveness in God, but then, in verse 5, he says that he is waiting. But if we look at it from a Christian point of view we might ask if it is necessary to wait. Our most basic belief, at least within the Reformed tradition is that forgiveness comes as a gift that comes from the grace of God. So, then it is not a matter of waiting for God's forgiveness, but rather accepting it through faith. We are justified by grace which we accept through faith. If there is any sense of having to wait, they no doubt arise out of feelings of self-guilt, but we can set those feelings and doubts aside through the act of confession. When we confess our sin, believing in God's grace, we find a new sense of freedom. In Christological terms, we are washed clean in the blood of the lamb.

Of course, there are other ways in which we do wait for God - in particular, waiting for answered prayer. Like the psalmist, we cry out from the depths of our soul, seeking God's blessing, or God's action in response to our prayerful petitions, but we get frustrated when , or if, they are not answered within our desired time. We also get anxious because we generally have expectations of how the prayer should be answered. As Kierkegaard once pointed out, we sometimes load our prayers with all the how's and when's, when the ultimate goal of prayer is to become silent before God. In other words, we place our trust in Him to answer our prayers as they should be answered - remembering Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane - " Thy will be done".

At one point in the play Vladimir points out that they "Were waiting for Godot", to which Estragon asks despairingly, if this is really where they were supposed to meet. And frequently they question whether they had the right time and place. This speaks to me of those times when our own doubts begin to set in - Did God here my prayer? Will God answer my prayer, and when?

At the very end of the play Vladimir says, "Well , shall we go?" Estragon replies, "Yes, let's go." But this is followed by the final stage direction, which says, (They do not move.). Forgive me, Beckett, if I am reading too much into this, but, there comes times when doubts set in and we are ready to give up - to stop waiting. But then there is this little vestige of faith that says don't move, as in, don't give up! As Beckett writes in one of his novels, "I can't go on. I'll go on."

Did you know that in the Greek language there are actually two words for time? The first is ' Chronos'. It's where we get the word chronology from. Chronos refers to that which we measure with clocks and calendars . The other word is ' Kairos'. It means, ' the right time'. In other words, there comes a time when circumstances are right for something to happen. It brings to mind the first verse of the third chapter of Ecclesiastes, " For everything thing there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven..."

God's ways are not our ways. God's time is not our time. God responds when the time is right. Our choice is simple. We wait with anxious doubts, or we wait while grounded in faith.

Let us pray: Loving God, always merciful and forgiving, we thank you for the gift of your grace, which, when accepted in faith sets us free, and we thank you for the life, death, and resurrection of your Son Jesus through whom your grace is revealed. We also offer thanksgiving for the gift of prayer - the means by which we can talk to you, and you can respond in your own time and way. May your Holy Spirit inspire and lead us in our prayers and give to us the eyes to see and the ears to hear the ways and actions that come in response. Set us free from anxiety and doubt as we wait upon you, trusting that your will shall truly be done. Amen.