
Midday Meditation – March 18, 2020

From the Rev. Nate Huddleston

Opening Collect

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

Psalm 88

O Lord, God of my salvation,
when, at night, I cry out in your presence,
let my prayer come before you;
incline your ear to my cry.

For my soul is full of troubles,
and my life draws near to Sheol.
I am counted among those who go down to the Pit;
I am like those who have no help,
like those forsaken among the dead,
like the slain that lie in the grave,
like those whom you remember no more,
for they are cut off from your hand.
You have put me in the depths of the Pit,
in the regions dark and deep.
Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
and you overwhelm me with all your waves.

You have caused my companions to shun me;
you have made me a thing of horror to them.
I am shut in so that I cannot escape;
my eye grows dim through sorrow.
Every day I call on you, O Lord;
I spread out my hands to you.
Do you work wonders for the dead?
Do the shades rise up to praise you?
Is your steadfast love declared in the grave,
or your faithfulness in Abaddon?

Are your wonders known in the darkness,
or your saving help in the land of forgetfulness?

But I, O Lord, cry out to you;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.
O Lord, why do you cast me off?
Why do you hide your face from me?
Wretched and close to death from my youth up,
I suffer your terrors; I am desperate. [\[a\]](#)
Your wrath has swept over me;
your dread assaults destroy me.
They surround me like a flood all day long;
from all sides they close in on me.
You have caused friend and neighbor to shun me;
my companions are in darkness.

Homily

If the blues has a truly mythic figure, one whose story hangs over the music the way a Charlie Parker does over jazz or a Hank Williams does over country, it's Robert Johnson. He is certainly one of the most celebrated figures in the history of the blues. Doomed, haunted, driven by inner demons, a tormented genius dead at an early age Robert Johnson's music resonates with despair, sorrow and lament that is the apex of the musical genre even today. Reading Psalm 88 this morning I cannot help but wonder if the Psalmist and Johnson were friends. Johnson's masterpiece "Cross Road Blues" written in 1936 echoes the anguish and desolation of the Psalmist with striking familiarity. I can just imagine each other them sitting in some small smokey juke joint in Hazelhurst Mississippi trading verses back and forth as they strum weathered guitars with rusty strings that have been bent over a lifetime of heartache.

*"I went to the crossroads, fell down on my knees, asked the Lord about have mercy"
"O Lord, my God, May Savior, by day and night I cry to you"*

*"Standing at the crossroads I tried to flag a ride. Didn't nobody seem to know me, everybody just pass me by"
"You have put my friends far from me, you have made me abhorred by them by them"*

*"Ooo, eee boy dark gonna catch me here. Lord I'm stadnin' at the crossroad, babe, I believe I'm sinkin' down"
"My friend and my neighbor you have put away from me, and darkness is my only companion"*

The sadness for each is apparent. Their words resound a haunting despair with each of them at their bitter end.

While the novelty of the similarity between the two writers is enough to contemplate on its own there is something more to be gained in connecting the two songs. If we can begin to hear the Psalmist with the same amount of despair that we hear in Johnson's voice maybe we can begin to grasp the desolation present in our own lives and in our broken world. More often than not we tend to go about our faith with a joy and fervor that celebrates the good news of the Gospel and a disposition towards being an "Easter" people. And rightly so! But in order to be an Easter people we must also be a "Good Friday" people. We must come face to face with the reality of suffering and utter hopelessness. The Psalmist and Johnson invite us to embrace that part of our faith articulating so aptly restlessness and despair, longing and disappointment, exile and estrangement. Their words are relevant today just as much as they were when they were written.

Even amongst the despondent words there is a tinge of hope that is sounded. In there most desperate times they still cry out to the Lord giving voice to their hope for deliverance. As Christians we know that the song is not finished yet but that Johnson and the Psalmist's part is important to the whole song that is salvation. For me, standing at the edge of despair and looking down into my own darkness I have found that singing the Psalms of the blues, a bridge of hope is built allowing me to cross and sing the song of joy. It is only in joining Robert Johnson and the Psalmist sing their notes of lament that we are able to sing the notes of hope and joy as Sunday comes.

Concluding Prayer

Almighty God,
by your command time runs its course;
forgive our impatience,
perfect our faith,
and, while we wait for the fulfilment of your promises,
grant us to have a good hope because of your word;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.