Sunday, July 6, 2025 - Meditation

The Psalm we read this morning begins with the period of suffering over.

I will exalt you, O Lord,
because you have lifted me up *
and have not let my enemies triumph over me.
2 O Lord my God, I cried out to you, *
and you restored me to health.
3 You brought me up, O Lord, from the dead; *
you restored my life as I was going down to the grave.

The suffering is now only a memory. God answered his prayer for relief. We sense that what he endured was no small thing: "You brought me up, O Lord, from the dead." Yet now, he stands on the other side, giving thanks for God's faithfulness. He even goes so far as to say that the suffering seems like just a passing moment:

"For his wrath endures but the twinkling of an eye, *
his favor for a lifetime.

Weeping may spend the night, *
    but joy comes in the morning.”
He doesn’t minimize his distress, because then he takes us on the journey of his descent.
“When I was comfortable, I said,
  “I will never stumble.
Because it pleased you, Lord,
  you made me a strong mountain.
But then you hid your presence.
  I was terrified.”

CS Lewis was married late in life. He never imagined himself a married man, and he was surprised when he found himself in love with an American woman named Joy. They lived happily married for six months when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. When she passed away they had been married four years. In response to her death Lewis wrote *A Grief Observed,* taking the reader on his journey through grief and loss. In one passage he sounds very much like the writer of our psalm: “When you

are happy, so happy you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be — or so it feels— welcomed with open arms."

The psalm says "While I felt secure, I said,

"I shall never be disturbed."

But Lewis continues:

"But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence."

"Then you hid your face, *

and I was filled with fear."

Lewis writes "No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing."

Then the psalmist reveals the depths of his suffering:

“I cried to you, O Lord; *
    I pleaded with the Lord, saying,
“What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the Pit?
    will the dust praise you or declare your faithfulness?”

Lewis asks, "How often -- will it be for always? -- how often will the vast emptiness astonish me like a complete novelty and make me say, "I never realized my loss till this moment"? The same leg is cut off time after time.”

Elsewhere he writes, “It doesn't really matter whether you grip the arms of the dentist's chair or let your hands lie in your lap. The drill drills on.”

How long will it last? The psalm says weeping may last for a night, but when you're awake during the night the minutes can seem like days. Eventually though there comes a moment when you see a faint light in the eastern sky. Is dawn really breaking?

In his own way, Lewis found that after the long night, something began to change: “Something quite unexpected has happened. It came this morning early. For various reasons, not in themselves at all mysterious, my heart was lighter than it had been for many weeks.”

“Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me; *
O Lord, be my helper.”
Then somehow - and who knows how long it took -
“You have turned my wailing into dancing; *
you have put off my sack-cloth and clothed me with joy.”
It turns out that we've been wearing this countenance, these funeral clothes so long - perhaps even clinging to them - that when God comes and removes them from us, we're surprised. It's quite unexpected. Joy returns.

It's not that God was away and has returned.

“The time when there is nothing at all in your soul except a cry for help may be just that time when God can't give it: you are like the drowning man who can't be helped because he clutches and grabs. Perhaps your own reiterated cries deafen you to the voice you hoped to hear.”

But joy has come in the morning. We have stopped clinging to the gifts themselves and have learned to cling more to God. We recognize that all the goodness, beauty and love we experience throughout our lives are ultimately gifts from God. Our journey through the night is a journey of redirecting our love through those gifts to the Giver of gifts.
"Thus up from the garden to the Gardener, from the sword to the Smith, to the life-giving Life and the Beauty that makes beautiful."

“Therefore my heart sings to you without ceasing; *
O Lord my God, I will give you thanks for ever.”