

But There Is Forgiveness
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First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
June 7, 2015

Psalm 130

¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

² Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!

³ If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

⁵ I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in God's word I hope;

⁶ my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷ O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with God is great power to redeem.

⁸ It is God who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

“If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?” Not a one among us is free of iniquity. Common understanding of the word is “sin” but at its root is unevenness, a state of not being equal. If God should record the ways in which we do not come up equal to – equal to what? equal to what we were created to be? equal to the relationship into which God calls us? If God should record the ways in which we fall short of our relationship with God and our relationship with others, who could stand?

We count all the ways others have wronged us and all the ways others are wrong. And we stop there. God? God counts and God responds with forgiveness, as if the counting and the forgiveness were one action instead of two, inseparable. God – and God alone – knows the ways by which we are wrong in God's sight, by God's standards, God's hopes and intentions for us. And even then, God offers forgiveness.

We have a sense of what God counts as wrong. You shall have no other gods before me – anything that drives our behavior other than God is a god of our own making. You shall not bow down to or worship idols – what do we put our faith in besides, even over and above, God? You shall not

make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God. We've long understood swearing, especially using God's name, to be the manifestation of this but it is so, so much more. Do we hate someone or dislike someone or disapprove of someone because we think it is what God would do? Author Anne Lamott describes this by saying, "You can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do."¹ Actor John Cusack, when asked who his hero was by *Vanity Fair* magazine, said, "Let's go with Jesus. Not the gay-hating, war-making political tool...but the outcast, subversive, supreme, adept who preferred the freaks and lepers and despised and doomed to the rich and powerful."² In the name of God, we are not to hate anyone, not thieves, prostitutes, terrorists, abusers, cheaters, liars, addicts, killers, insert person-who-makes-us-uncomfortable here. *That* is the blasphemy. God is love. Not God is love, with conditions. God is love. The marking of iniquities is up to God, and so is the forgiveness. Next we read: remember the Sabbath day. No, really. Observe the Sabbath. And these are just the ways of getting it right with God. Six more commandments inform us how to get it right with one another.

However it is we get it wrong in God's eyes, whether with God or with one another or both, and we do, God knows AND God forgives. If we follow the psalmist's lead, we come to God in humble eagerness for reconciliation. We open with lament, and then comes praise, which leads to hope, which leads to more praise. "Out of the depths I cry to you – but there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered – I wait for the Lord...and in God's word I hope – it is God who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities."

Not only does God count/forgive but God redeems. Kind of like those infomercials: but wait, there's more! But wait, there's much, much more!³ Except the low, low price is nothing. God is always redeeming us from the ways by which, through which, we continue to be uneven from what we really could be. We are ever being redeemed until that day when we are raised to life eternal where we will be truly whole. This week a man named Terry Coffey took to Facebook to make this comment, "As I see post after post about Bruce Jenner's transition to a woman, and I hear words like, [sic] bravery, heroism, and courage, just thought I'd remind all of us what real American courage, heroism, and bravery looks like!" Beneath this post he included a photo showing a soldier carrying another soldier who is still shooting despite being slung over the back of the carrying soldier.⁴

¹ <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/9846-you-can-safely-assume-you-ve-created-god-in-your-own>

² *Vanity Fair* June 2008.

³ Original Ginsu knife commercial: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXC5k9cayG8>

⁴ <http://www.rawstory.com/2015/06/man-learns-amazing-lesson-in-irony-after-mocking-caitlyn-jenners-bravery-in-viral-facebook-post/>

Wanting to give credit to the photographer after his post went viral, Coffey found the photographer's name and then found out about the photographer, Mark Hogancamp. In Coffey's words, here is what he learned: "In an ironic twist, I have discovered that the photo is part of a documentary created by a man who was beaten nearly to death outside of a bar in 2000... Why was he nearly beaten to death by 5 strangers? Because he was a cross-dresser... I could have chosen any one of hundreds of photos depicting bravery, but I chose this one. Do I think it was an accident? No, I don't... What happened to this man was cruel, wrong, and unforgivable... Hate helps nothing, love wounds no one, and God heals all."⁵ God redeems, and, sometimes, we're even paying enough attention to notice. Love wounds no one. Love wounds no one. Love wounds no one.

As we anticipate our own complete redemption, as we try to remember until that day that love wounds no one, we wait. The language of the psalmist bears repeating: I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in God's word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning. If you were ever afraid of the dark as a child, do you understand this type of active waiting? What about for a wedding day? Or the birth of a child? Or retirement? In the times of the psalmist, nighttime, when it was dark, was a dangerous time when bandits prowled and foes attacked. With the glimmer of light came the return of safety. As we wait in this dangerous time, when we easily forget to love, when it takes effort to remind ourselves to follow the guides God has given us, we wait for that time when it will only be natural to love as God loves, and to forgive as God forgives. Do not give up. Hold onto hope. With God is great power to redeem. It is God who will redeem us from all our iniquities.

Let us pray: Almighty God, we lament to you the ways in which we know we have fallen short. We are in awe of your greatness that bridges the gap. We await in hope for that day when we will no longer struggle to be as you have created us. Only you can make us whole and we praise you for that. Amen.

⁵ Ibid.