

Season after Pentecost/Psalms 30

July 2, 2017

Haven Lutheran Church

Readings: John 6: 67-69; Psalm 30

Grace to you and peace from our Triune God — Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen

Tony Campolo is an ordained Baptist minister, evangelist and a now-retired professor of sociology. He grew up in West Philadelphia and he tells this story:

"I went to my first black funeral when I was 16 years old. A friend of mine, Clarence, had died. The pastor was incredible. From the pulpit, he talked about the Resurrection in beautiful terms. He had us thrilled. He came down from the pulpit, went to the family, and comforted them from the fourteenth chapter of John. "Let not your heart be troubled," he said, " 'You believe in God, believe also in me,' said Jesus. Clarence has gone to heavenly mansions."

Then, for the last 20 minutes of the sermon, he actually preached to the open casket. Now, that's drama! He yelled at the corpse: "Clarence! Clarence!" He said it with such authority. I would not have been surprised had there been an answer. He said, "Clarence, there were a lot of things we should have said to you that we never said to you. You got away too fast, Clarence. You got away too fast." He went down this litany of beautiful things that Clarence had done for people. When he finished—here's the dramatic part—he said, "That's it, Clarence. There's nothing more to say. When there's nothing more to say, there's only one thing to say. Good night. Good night, Clarence!" He grabbed the lid of the casket and slammed it shut. "Good night, Clarence!" *Boom!*

Shock waves went over the congregation. As the preacher then lifted his head, you could see there was this smile on his face. He said, "Good night, Clarence. Good night, Clarence, because I know, I know that God is going to give you a good morning!" The choir stood and starting singing, "On that great morning, we shall rise, we shall rise." We were dancing in the aisles and hugging each other. I knew the joy of the Lord, a joy that in the face of death laughs and sings and dances, for there is no sting to death."¹

It seems to me that preacher was preaching psalm 30. He spoke to the sadness and grief of the family and community. He spoke to the regret and heartache. He addressed the finality of death and loss. But when he said good night to Clarence and slammed down the coffin's lid, he caused everyone there to catch their breath and recalibrate their hearts. It may be good night for Clarence on this side of eternity but God has brought him to good morning on the great side of eternal life. It may be good-bye to Clarence for now but not forever. In his boldness, that preacher reminded everyone that in God's hands, mourning will be turned into dancing and sackcloth exchanged for joy. Did it mean there was no more mourning or sorrow for those who loved Clarence? No, of course not. But it did lift up the hope-giving truth that grief, sadness and even death will not be as powerful as God's love, promises and victory.

Old Testament Scholar, Walter Brueggemann, unapologetically suggests we update the subscriptions of the Psalms so we read and claim the psalms for our own lives. "Psalm 30 is more than "A song of dedication of the temple. Of David," as it says in your Bible under Psalm 30. It is "a song of thanksgiving for healing and deliverance of Marcie,"² John, Gail, YOU, me. It's about you and me when we cried out to the Lord and when others prayed for us when we couldn't do it ourselves. Then there comes the time when you realize you are starting to see light, breathing isn't so difficult, you're laughing again and there is living still to be enjoyed. The realization comes to you: "O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me." (vs. 2) Can you look back and see times in your life when life was terribly unraveled and now you see how slowly, maybe unperceptively, there came to be resurrection? That is the source of this psalm of thanksgiving.

The psalmist ---- let's just call her Marcie — begins with thanksgiving, Lord "look what you have done. You have raised me up from the lowest of lows."³

"And then you notice, in verses 4 and 5, Marcie telling her story to everyone. She cannot help it. It's her Easter story. She exhorts those around her, 'Give thanks to his holy name.' She acknowledges the momentary Good Friday pain, "For his anger is but

for a moment . . . weeping may linger for the night,” before the Easter joy triumphs “his favor is for a lifetime . . . joy comes in the morning.” It does no good to cover up the pain. Go ahead and acknowledge the pain for joy will come in the morning.” Her testimony is heartfelt and calls to be shared.

She confesses that in her prosperity, she didn't need God. She became overconfident as if she was above or beyond problems other people had. She remembers thinking God hid his face. She recalls how she tried to unashamedly bargain with God: “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?” (vs. 9) In the end, she “knows it was not pleading that has brought her to this place of new life. She knows the Lord is the one who has turned her “mourning into dancing . . . removed her sackcloth and clothed her with you” (vs. 11). The psalmist recognizes that the Lord did not do this so that she can return to” . . . [where and who she was before] but so that her ascent to new life can focus on” living differently, more fully as she lives in gratitude and praise of the Lord.⁴

Psalm 30 is our story of trying to live faithfully and faith-filled with God on the roller coaster of real life. It acknowledges the ups and downs we all encounter. Some of them being mere bumps in the road and others mighty mountains. But Psalm 30 reminds us that there is more to life than simply enduring. Because God is love, God is with us, there is movement from disorientation to reorientation; darkness to light; death to life. Jesus did not stay dead in the tomb. God will not leave us in the pit. So we can sing, we can dance, we can hope and praise God no matter what we may face.

Dr. Campolo tells of another time when he preached in his predominately-black home church in Philadelphia. He said he was on fire that day and took the congregation

to 'the heights of glory'." As he sat down, his pastor patted his knee, "You did alright, boy." Dr. Tony replied, "You going to be able to top that?" The older black pastor smiled, walked to the pulpit and did just that with one sentence, "It's Friday . . . but Sunday's coming." It started softly, building in volume and intensity, carrying everyone into the gospel:

"It's Friday. Jesus is arrested in the garden where he was praying. But Sunday's coming.

It's Friday. The disciples are hiding and Peter's denying that he knows the Lord. But Sunday's coming.

It's Friday. Jesus is standing before the high priest of Israel, silent as a lamb before the slaughter. But Sunday's coming.

It's Friday. Jesus is beaten, mocked, and spit upon. But Sunday's coming."

He continued through the excruciating details of Jesus torture and crucifixion. Each time, It's Friday . . . but Sunday's coming.

"And on that horrible day 2000 years ago, Jesus the Christ, the Lord of glory, the only begotten Son of God, the only perfect man died on the cross of Calvary. Satan thought that he had won the victory. Surely, he had destroyed the Son of God. Finally, he had disproved the prophecy God had uttered in the Garden and the one who was to crush his head had been destroyed. But that was Friday.

Now it's Sunday. And just about dawn on that first day of the week, there was a great earthquake. But that wasn't the only thing that was shaking because now it's Sunday. And the angel of the Lord is coming down out of heaven and rolling the stone away from the door of the tomb. Yes, it's Sunday, and the angel of the Lord is sitting on that stone and the guards posted at the tomb to keep the body from disappearing were shaking in their boots because it's Sunday, and the lamb that was silent before the slaughter is now the resurrected lion from the tribe of Judah, for He is not here, the angel says. He is risen indeed. It's Sunday."⁵

Jesus lived psalm 30. Through him God confirmed that even though we may only see Friday, Sunday's coming. It's not that we are simply to be passive, waiting for God to do

magic. We partner with God the best we can. We put one foot before the other, trying to follow Jesus, and holding on to the truth of what Psalm 30 and Easter show us:

“Friday. Some are looking at the world and saying, “As things have been, so they shall be. You can’t change nothing in this world! You can’t change nothing in this world!” But they didn’t know that it was only Friday ---- Sunday’s coming.

Friday. Those forces that oppress the poor and keep people down, those forces that destroy people, the forces in control now, those forces that are gonna rule, they don’t know it’s only Friday ---- Sunday’s coming.

Friday. People are saying, “Darkness is gonna rule the world, sadness is gonna be everywhere,” but they don’t know it’s only Friday ---- Sunday’s coming.

Friday. Your boyfriend broke up with you for no good reason. You have to have yet another surgery. Work is consuming you. The news is frightening or depressing. Don’t you forget, it’s only Friday ---- Sunday’s coming.

This is good news. This is the very good news — too good to keep to ourselves. Even though the world may be rotten”⁶ . . . Even though things may be oh so hard for you, we know it’s only Friday ---- Sunday’s coming!

Linda M Alessandri 7/1/17

ENDNOTES

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1. Tony Campolo, in the sermon "The Year of Jubilee," PreachingToday.com preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2009/january/7010509.html
 2. Shauna Hannan, "Commentary on Psalm 30" as posted on www.workingpreacher.org
 3. Shauna Hannan, "Commentary on Psalm 30" as posted on www.workingpreacher.org
 4. Adapted from Shauna Hannan, "Commentary on Psalm 30" as posted on www.workingpreacher.org
 5. Said to be from text of original sermon preached by Campolo’s pastor mention in Campolo’s sermon below.
 6. Quotes and paraphrases form Tony Campolo’s sermon, “It’s Friday but Sundays Comin” as posted on <http://tonycampolo.org/its-friday-but-sundays-coming/#.WVf7z4jyvmY> (audio)