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Tabor Presbyterian Church
June 28, 2020

Psalm 13
Verse 4 to 5
Zoom Worship

On Wednesday in Charleston, South Carolina, a crowd assembled to clap when the towering John C. Calhoun was removed from his perch high above the city.

We are tearing things down, figuratively, too; dismantling white supremacy. Long overdue. There is anger in the land, righteous anger, but destruction alone won't change systems. There must be something on the other side of the dismantling.

In our book group on Tuesday we discussed the emphasis on fire in the New Testament, as a symbol of transformation. Jesus said, "*I have come to cast fire upon the earth....*" (Luke 12:49), which sounds puzzling, given his contrasting messages about peace. But on the way to peace, justice, something has to change, to be transformed.

Here is a quote (page 92) from our book **The Universal Christ**: "*Farmers, forestry workers, and Native peoples know that fire is a renewing force, even as it also can be destructive.*" In other words, destruction has its place, can even be necessary for something new to be born. In a wound, you have to destroy the infection for healing to begin. Though it **is** hard, when it happens to us, personally; that's when we can cue the Psalms.

Psalm 13 tells a universal story, a story familiar to most people at some point in our lives. Despondency. Confusion. Loneliness. Feeling bereft. The absence of God. A sense of being forgotten.

How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?

Dr. King said that moderates kept telling him, *wait, wait, you're taking things too fast, slow down*. But the cries of his ancestors resounded the biblical refrain - *How long, Lord?* In his book *Why We Can't Wait*, King says: *This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never.'*

But Psalm 13 doesn't allow for never. It lingers on the possibility of it, but then shifts, in verse 5. Life can feel like perpetual waiting, while evildoers

rejoice in their evil. Then comes the shift from verse 4 to verse 5: *“But I trusted in your steadfast love.”*

This is typical of the Psalms, including Psalm 22, the one Jesus quotes from the cross — *“My God My God, why have you forsaken me?”* Twenty-three verses after that opening line the Psalmist says, *God “has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; God has not hidden God’s face from him but has listened to his cry for help.”*

I’d like to dwell a bit on the space before the shifts. In Psalm 13, between verse 4 and 5. This separation between the two verses could be called the **liminal space**. It is the not-yet place. It can feel like the burn of a fire. This space between verse 4 and 5.

Anthropologist Arnold van Gennep first coined and defined the term liminal space. Studying different cultures and their rituals, he called liminal space the quality of disorientation during the middle stage of a ritual, when participants no longer hold their pre-ritual status but have not yet begun the transition to the status they will hold when the ritual is complete.

People have taken the term and run with it, to describe liminal space as those times like adolescence, when we’re not quite a kid but not quite an adult — between. Like the rituals of some tribes, we can imagine rites of passage as rigorous, disruptive, up is down and down is up, and you come out different, changed, more mature.

The word “liminal” comes from the Latin word *limens*, which means, “threshold.” It is when you have left what you know, but haven’t arrived in a new place. **It can feel like a death.** Your sense of identity dissolves to some extent, bringing about disorientation, but also the possibility of new perspectives. Think of Jesus in the wilderness. Those who go through these experiences and learn from them tend to be our greatest teachers.

Between and between, that liminal time, is no place we LIKE to be. When liminal moments happen TO us, like crises, like not knowing, not sure that dawn will come, these are times in our lives when our eyes can be opened. We need to be disrupted, and liminal spaces disrupt, so that we may gain spiritual insights.

There are disruptions happening now, as people of color are asking white people to see from the eyes of color. And there is the further disruption coming from those who don't want to see it. To say nothing of doing something about it. Richard Rohr defines liminal time in this way:

“It is when you have left, or are about to leave, the tried and true, but have not yet been able to replace it with anything else. It is when you are between your old comfort zone and any possible new answer. If you are not trained in how to hold anxiety, how to live with ambiguity, how to entrust and wait, you will run...anything to flee this terrible cloud of unknowing.”

Many of us enjoy our comfort, and fight to protect it, but comfort is like the lure of certainty — it is the notorious work of the tempter, the deceiver, the one Jesus met in the wilderness.

Going into the wilderness is the opposite of fleeing or avoiding. The Psalms, and the Resurrection, offer us the “other side,” but we can't just be told ABOUT IT, we will have to experience it, that transition, from verse 4 to verse 5. From death to new life.

I think our young people could benefit from hearing from you, about times in your life when you've been in a liminal space, what it was like, and that you're here on the other side of it.

When you're young, and you're in a bind, a hard place, it seems like it will never end. It seems like it will always be the way it is in that hard moment. It's hard to believe sometimes that that you will turn a corner. But life is full of sharp edges and detours and dead ends, all kinds of lostness. That is why Jesus talked so much about lostness — the lost son, the lost coin, the lost sheep. He names our reality for us, and then experienced the reality — of loneliness, isolation, fear. Shepherd who became lamb.

Let's turn off the recording of our zoom time and hear from you, about your movement from verse 4 to 5.....

Prayers of the People

Dear Lord, there is such much that weighs heavy, as so many of us can echo the words of Psalm 13, "*How long, Lord?*" Pressures crowd in upon us and get us down. News of cruelty and the inability to do anything about it, torment us.

And global issues: poverty, climate change, disease, and so on. It does not help when we feel that as Christians we should be doing so much better. Gracious and loving God, we rejoice that you are with us in our troubles, you know us and you love us – and evildoers don't have the last word.

We pray for a world in need – in need not just of a technical fix, but the fire of renewal, undergirded by love and grace.

We pray that you would continue to come alongside us and all those for whom we pray, that you would show us Jesus, the light of the world, as companion in our liminal moments. That we *have been* set free. Enable us to use our freedom to support your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.....Lord's Prayer.