

“Yet I Will Wait”

by Greg Smith-Young (Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge)
*For a Memorial Service to which bereaved families
served by Elora-Bethany during the past year were invited.*

Psalms 42-43

October 30, 2016

The Psalms are the song-and-prayer book of the Bible. They lead us through the moods and seasons of life with God. Many have a note at the beginning, about who wrote it or when. I usually don't pay much attention to the note. I almost skipped it this time.¹ I wanted to get to the psalm. But something made me stop.

“A maskil of the Sons of Korah.”

I'm thinking, “what's a maskil?” I looked it up. Turns out, a maskil is meant to teach us something.² And I'm thinking, “who were the Sons of Korah?” I looked it up. Turns out they were a singing family, who served in God's Temple.³

So we have a song, written to teach us, written by someone whose job it was to sing worship for God. Interesting, because the Psalm starts with the Singer and God not on speaking terms.

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“Like a deer craves streams of water. . . .”

If you look for images that are paired with this psalm, they often show deer drinking from a stream. It's a picture of desiring God, and God satisfying us.

Except that's not what is going on in this psalm. The deer thirsts. The deer craves. The deer needs water . . . and cannot find it. The deer longs . . . and comes up empty.⁴ They deer is in a desert.

It seems the Singer has been sent away, or taken away, or somehow cut off. Some circumstance has removed the presence of God. No more does the Singer feel it, know it, trust that God is here.

To the Singer, God is gone.

The Singer remembers when it was otherwise. Remembers being part of God's

¹ Psalms 42 and 43 are actually “a single, close-knit poem.” Derek Kidner, Psalms 1-72 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 165.

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psalms#Themes>

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korahites>

⁴ See this blog post about by Michael Spencer, “How CCM Sanitizes the Wilderness.” (CCM stands for “Contemporary Christian Music.”) www.internetmonk.com/archive/how-ccm-sanitizes-the-wilderness

worshipping people. Remembers joining the celebration where every sense shouted out, “God is with us! We are not alone! Thanks be to God!”

Now, just tears. No refreshment. Just salty tears. No water. Tears.

“*Where is God?*” Folks are asking. The Singer has no answer.

Sound familiar? We aren’t sure what that Singer lost, but you know what you’ve lost. Who you’ve lost. And maybe it’s torn away any sense that God is with you. Maybe you feel bad about that. Maybe not. Whatever, that’s what it is.

This first part ends, with the Singer looking upon themselves (so to speak). And wondering.

*“Why, are you so depressed?
Why are you in turmoil inside?”
Yet I will wait for God.
I will again praise Him, my Rescuer! My God!*

III

Out of desert thirst, the psalm then throws us into a very different landscape. Water abundant! The sources of the Jordan River, flowing down from mounts Hermon and Mizar.

Relief! Or not.

The Singer, who has just been thirsting, is now drowning.

Grief throws me from one mood to the next. We talk about “stages of grief.” That can help. But it sounds too orderly. Grief is chaos. Grief swirls us from summer’s scorching heat to winter’s icy squeeze, not in months but minutes. Unlike the seasons, grief follows no calendar. All we can do is live each season as it comes. Knowing, but maybe not feeling, that with each turn there is some movement toward . . . well, something better.

Until now, the Singer has said barely a word to God.⁵ As I said, it seems like they are not on speaking terms. Sometimes, it is like that.

But now, the Singer breaks silence to accuse. Accuse God!

*You have forgotten me!
Why?
Why do I have to walk around in grief
with enemies harassing me?⁶*

⁵ In verses 1-5, the only address to God is in verse 1. The rest speaks of God, but not to God.

⁶ My rendering of verse 9, using insight from the ESV, NIV and CEB translations.

No shout of praise, nor offering of thanksgiving. Not even close!

Still, it is something.

Somehow we get the idea that we need to be polite with God. You know, *"If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all."* Well, the Psalms (including this one) say different. God wants to heal us. God knows that our soul's healing means getting that ugly stuff out. Healing needs honesty. For love of us, God welcomes our honesty. Even our ugly honesty.

The Singer seems to know this. Right before the accusation comes a celebration of God's stick-with-us love. Accusation and celebration — the Singer knows both.

This second part ends like the first, with the Singer again looking upon themselves. And wondering as before:

*"Why, are you so depressed?
Why are you in turmoil inside?"
Yet I will wait for God.
I will again praise Him, my Rescuer! My God!*

IV

We have gone from drought to deluge. Now the Singer finally asks: *Defend and deliver me, O God. Protect me, against deceit, injustice, and all that is not of You. Let me see. Show me. Let me know. Teach me. Back to You, lead me.*

Grief remains. What God is doing in all of this is still an open question. Much, we will never know.

Still, the Singer starts trusting enough to ask, again. To start leaning on God, again. A measure of confidence slowly returns. Confidence that despite it all, and through it all, God is with us. Buried words like "joy" and "delight" are dug up and dusted off to be used, again.

Whatever was lost, is still lost. There is no undoing it. But now, there is a going-forward.

Grief remains. Grief changes. The chaos does not boil as much, though it still simmers. Seasons still change, and new seasons emerge.

Once more, we hear the Singer wonder:

*"Why, are you so depressed?
Why are you in turmoil inside?"
Yet I will wait for God.
I will again praise Him, my Rescuer! My God!*

Each part of this two-psalm poem ends with this same idea.

*Why am I wrecked?
Yet, I will wait.*

I wonder if, each time, the tone changes. The words are always the same. But the mood around them changes.

From despair: *Yet, I will wait!*

Through defiance: *Yet, I will wait!*

To determination: *Yet, I will wait!*

V

Who is this God for whom we wait? In whom we hope?

In the Hebrew language — the language in which this psalm was written — the idea of waiting goes with the idea of hoping. In fact, translators will render this same Hebrew word into English either way.

*Yet, I will wait.
Yet, I will hope.*

In my despair, I will wait, I will hope.
In my defiance, I will wait, I will hope.
In my determination, I will wait, I will hope.

We can do that, because God is with us in the despair, when we are so thirsty and so empty. God is with us in the defiance, when we are so angry and nothing makes sense. God is with us in our determination, when we ask for God's protection and seek God's direction.

Whether we feel it or not, God is with us. God does not depend on our feelings.

Whether we know it or not, God is with us. God is not limited to our knowledge.

Whether we have anything to say to God, or not, God says to us:

*I love you.
I will never, ever let you go.
I am faithful.
And you are mine.*

And I will wait for you.