

Psalm 130 Waiting for Morning
Genesis 3:8-15
June 6, 2021

The other day on one of my walks I ran across a woman on her walk with her young daughter. The little girl said to me, “we are looking for snakes.” I asked if snakes were a problem. The mom said, “no, we like snakes.” The little girl agreed.

Notwithstanding the text from Genesis with the cursed serpent and the proclaimed enmity between the woman Eve and it’s descendants, these two women like snakes, or so they said, and were searching for them. Ophidology, which is the study of snakes, informs us that snakes have been given a bad rap by the story in Genesis, and are a necessary and valuable part of the ecological landscape.

Nevertheless, most of the people I know, both men and women, are more like Indiana Jones, and they do not like snakes, are not fond of them. Like me, they don’t spend much time dealing with them.

In this Genesis text, the woman’s punishment for partaking of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was enmity with snakes and pain in childbirth. The man’s punishment was to be removed from the Garden of Eden and to endure struggle against nature to provide the necessary goods to survive.

In an agricultural environment, I am sure, encounters with snakes are more common than in the suburbs

where I have spent most of my life. Times have changed, and one of the most critical features of the changes is the transition from an agrarian to an industrial way of life. Snakes are not much of an issue for most of us most of the time.

Working the land has largely been conquered by machines and modern farming techniques that to a large degree can overcome the whims of nature. All my life I have gotten my food at the grocery store, which seems always to have whatever I need.

But we still suffer the affects of our sinfulness. There are still problems associated with the way things go when people get too attached with what they think is good, desirable to the eyes, pleasing. We tend to lose control in our selfishness, resulting in unsatisfying lives and never-ending conflict with nature, and with each other. We remain under the curse.

The account in Genesis is very remarkable in the way it interprets human life and the struggle and suffering that is common to it. But it is only the beginning and at that point, does not offer a solution. And that makes the message of the 130th Psalm even more remarkable.

For it begins in the depths of despair, not taking much effort to explain how we got there, but recognizing that we *are* there and crying out. We all deal with the darkness, we all live in the depths. That is why the psalm is interesting.

The cry from the depths is a desperate one. It involves the realization that one is *in*, entirely over one's head. The prayer that begins, "Out of the depths," involves a rarely made acknowledgment, and one very typically avoided. We do not like to think of ourselves as being, "in the depths."

The next stanza offers an epitaph that is easily stepped over but one which deserves greater attention. After the stammering question, "if thou, O Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand," comes the provocative affirmation,

"But there is forgiveness with Thee, that thou mayest be *feared*."

Of all things "*feared*." I acknowledge the need to water this down by turning it into "respect, or reverence." I am sure that these renderings are legitimate etymological attempts to reach out for the meaning of the word. But they may also be attempts to evade.

What could be more fearful than forgiveness? Imagine justice and righteousness flowing like a mighty stream, or like a tsunami. What could prevent its flow? One of the clear insistences of the bible is that in spite of contrary appearances, the flood of justice is coming. Humanly speaking, there is no stopping it.

The righteousness of God is the greatest power in the universe. Even just the idea of a strength strong enough to hinder it must be thought of as a "fearful, terrifying," power before it is dismissed as something

to be merely respected; the power of God's mercy holding back the power of God's judgment, in love.

Let us linger here awhile, don't step over it too quickly. It is Jesus hanging there on Pilate's cross; it is our gospel. And slowly, the psalm moves,

"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits. My soul waits for the Lord more than the watchman awaits the morning, more than the watchman awaits the morning.

We all await the eternal morning. The waiting is our discipline, a life spent waiting *is* a meaningful life when it is spent waiting for God's mercy to overwhelm God's wrath, because it is confident in its outcome, and not willing to settle for lesser goods, ones that the serpent offered the people in the garden, the ones that are merely good for food, pleasing to the eye, superficial.

The waiting itself is a sacrifice and a prayer, and all along we have and are being called to a life of *sacrifice and prayer*.

O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love, and with the Lord is full redemption. And God will redeem Israel, (redeem us), from all our sins."