



COMMUNITY  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH

MINISTER  
DAN YEAZEL, PREACHING  
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7<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
February 19, 2006

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*Psalm 41*

### Sad Songs

Intro: The Psalms are a collection of hymns that were used at a variety of times for worship in ancient days. Some were meant to be used as collective prayers, others as private individual appeals to God. This morning's Psalm is an individual song of lament.

Here is a question for fans of country music. Why did Bubba shoot the jukebox? (because it played a sad song and made him cry) Sad Songs, songs that can make you cry. Whether you love country music or opera, gospel or jazz. Almost every style of music has a way of bringing out and expressing deep soul aches and mourning. Elton John sings about sad songs saying "When all hope is gone... sad songs say so much. If someone else is suffering enough to write it down When every single word makes sense. Then it's easier to have those songs around."

The Psalms give us the words to old old songs and we've had them around for quite some time. There is a power of

expression, a depth of feeling, that comes out of the Psalms. Pain and grace both come through even just the words. Words to a song can give us only so much, one need to hear both the words and the music to fully understand the message. In the book of Psalms we have the words recorded, but we do not know the music. The words reveal the pain, they tell the stories of suffering. And we can imagine that the music provides the reassurance, the grace that somehow, even if it is just by singing, and giving voice to one's problems, that things will get better.

In ancient times the Jews felt a much more immediate sense of God's presence in their lives. God was right there in the

room with them, they would talk to God and raise their voice to God, and in this case the Psalmist is singing his blues face to face with God.

Looking at the Psalm, we do not know just who the Psalmist is. It could be that David wrote this, we don't really know. But what is more important is the experience that has brought this person to this point. The writer has had the experience of going to the edge of the pit, looking down it, and not going over. His trust remains steadfastly with God through what is apparently his last days. He has quite a list of complaints, there is no doubt about that, but in spite of the greatness of his pain, he trusts in and seeks after God.

Looking at his list of troubles is almost overwhelming. First off, he is sick and dying, lying on his deathbed. In this day, illness was seen as punishment from God for sin. So everyone around may well have been asking what did he do to bring this on himself. He was probably asking what did I do to deserve this as well. I think about today and how we still talk like that at times, one does not need to go far to hear someone say "people with AID's get what they deserve" or "cancer is something you bring on yourself." Imagine the sense of rejection one would feel hearing that. In today's society we seem to worship health. Look at all the fitness spas, and

diet programs. It seems as though to be young and strong is the only way to be. You and I may not say that, but our culture does.

So our psalmist is deathly ill, but that is not the worst of his problems. With his illness comes a sense of feeling abandoned. His so-called friends come to visit him, but they can offer no comfort. They give empty words. This was another place that I stopped to reflect how things are today and how difficult it is for us to sit with another in times of pain. Think about going to visit a friend in the hospital who was dying of cancer, or had taken drug overdose. What does one say? In my days as a chaplain and I can't tell you how many people would speak of the pain of family members would come to see them and just talk about the weather and not get into the real issues of concern like how they were preparing for death.

His friends have come and gone not providing any comfort, in fact they are adding to his pain by the gossip that they share out in the community. He feels abandoned what is worse is the feeling of betrayal. This is perhaps his greatest pain. We see it in the "My closest friend with whom I shared bread has lifted his heel against me" Kicked me when I was down. Jesus quotes this phrase to describe Judas, in the New Testament. Judas was the one who would eat bread

with him and then lift his heel against him. The heel can be lifted in so many ways. For the Psalmist, it was in the gossip being spread about him. And those who went on to say when will he die and his name perish forever. Lineage, or having a family tree is essential to the identity of a Jew and these people were taking that away from him, even while he was still alive. This is salt in the wounds.

All of this leads the Psalmist to the edge of despair. In the middle of the Psalm he is hanging over Sheol, the pit. There is river of tears from the Psalmist's bed. Pain is like a river, but grace is like the riverbanks. In the blues, pain is always met by grace. The blues flow like a river. The river is pain and the banks are grace. If we had only pain in our lives we would become completely cynical and of no good to God or anyone. If we had only grace in our lives we would be of no use to those with great deal of suffering and we would not be experiencing the fullness of life. We need to have both. But Grace sets the course. The banks of the river determine where it will flow. Grace has the final say.

The pain will flow, we are always going to have pain in our lives. But there will always be grace, that contains it, gives it shape and defines where it will go. The Psalmist knows this too. Despair does

not have the final word, death is not the victor. His trust is in the Lord, and he calls out to God with all that he is and says here I am lord, a sinner. Have mercy on me! And he is restored to health. The Psalmist knows this. Look at the ending. Lord, I know you are pleased with me for my enemy has not triumphed over me and I am set in your presence forever.

Even when other trusted places may seem to fade away, there is always God waiting to welcome us, accept us and comfort us. The song we learned in early on says take everything to God in Prayer. Take your pain, take your praise, take your joys, your troubles to God we find an hallelujah there somehow for we will be heard. Amen.