

First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan
Summer in the Psalms: Psalm 42
A Psalm of Dependence on God
Sunday, August 16, 2020
Rev. Mark Hovermale

Announcements by Rev. Hovermale

On Thursday, August 20, from 1:00 to 6:00 p.m., FPCP is holding a drive in the parking lot to collect backpacks and school supplies for the 3000 children living in foster care in Wayne County. A preloaded backpack would be most helpful; (Five Below has good prices). Please check the Friday newsletter for a chart of needed school supplies by grade levels,

Pre-K – 3rd grade • 4th and 5th grade • 6th – 9th grade • 10th – 12th grade.

If it's easier for you and you don't feel comfortable coming to church parking lot, you can send a check made out to FPCP with the word, "backpack" in the memo line, to provide money for us to purchase backpacks for the most needed.

Our church will be holding a congregational meeting on Zoom, on Sunday August 23rd, at 11:00 AM. That is one week from today. The purpose of the meeting is for us to elect a new class of elders and deacons. We do this every year, but this year we are having to do it on Zoom. The list of nominees who have agreed to serve is found on the church's website and is in our Friday newsletter. To make this Zoom vote valid we need a minimum of 80 people to attend the Zoom gathering, so we need members of the church to preregister on our church's website. We will send you a Zoom link next Friday, prior to the congregational vote. Please mark your calendars for Sunday August 23rd at 11:00 AM for a short Zoom meeting that is particularly important to our church's life.

We are doing a fund-raising event on Saturday, August 22nd to raise money for Second Mile Center, specifically for their parking lot. This parking lot provides the children with an outdoor space for basketball and outdoor play along with outreach events to the community, including community dinners, which is so key. The pandemic has put pressure on all kinds of nonprofit ministries including Second Mile Center and we need to fix this broken pavement because it causes so many problems and hazards to the children. We want to invite you to partner with us. You can pray for Second Mile Center, but you can make a financial contribution, or both! Here's how we're doing this. We're hoping to raise \$19,000, specifically for the parking lot. Please send your check to First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth 701 Church St., Plymouth MI 48170. Please also place the words or letters, Fitness in Christ (FIC) / Second Mile Center (SMC) in the memo line of your check. Second Mile Center does an amazing job-- they are the real deal! Let's support them; let's help them out. Thank you so much.

Introduction to Sermon Theme - Rev. Hovermale

We are continuing our Summer in the Psalms sermon series, and specifically today it is Psalm 42. Now Psalm 42 is the start of book #2 of Psalms, which is actually divided into five books. This gets interesting! Psalm 42 and 43 are actually supposed to be together in one prayer. In fact, in the Hebrew manuscripts Psalm 42 and 43 were actually one psalm. This one prayer is divided into two chapters, or Psalms, today because of liturgical reasons.

These two Psalms really express a basic biblical fundamental belief and conviction that all human life depends on God and our relationship to Him. Let me say that again: all human life depends on God and our relationship to Him. That does not sound very controversial. They would agree with this in biblical times and 25 to 30 years ago, the belief that all things hinge on God and a relationship with him would not have been a controversial statement. But today, in 2020, well, that is a little bit of a controversial statement, to simply say that all human life depends on God and our relationship with him. Not everyone agrees with that. In fact, that is not a very popular opinion today! Yet God's Word does not change as culture changes and everything else happens. God's Word stays steadfast and this Psalm clearly says that our life depends on God.

Scripture Reading, Psalm 42 - Rich Rej

¹ As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.

² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

³ My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

*⁴ These things I remember as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go to the house of God
under the protection of the Mighty One
with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng.*

*⁵ Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*

*⁶ My soul is downcast within me; therefore,
I will remember you from the land of the Jordan,
the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.*

*⁷ Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers have swept over me.*

*⁸ By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.*

*⁹ I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"*

*¹⁰ My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long,
"Where is your God?"*

*¹¹ Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior, and my God.*

Sermon – Rev. Hovermale

Our sermon today is on Psalm 42. Oh, what a great passage of scripture. I love this! The 1st four verses are so famous, but the first verse is the most famous one you've heard from Psalm 42. It says, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God." Water is a necessity of life. They say water is life; water is essential. It is important for just keeping your internal body temperature right; you can't live without water. In fact, you can live three weeks, I found out, without food, but three days is all you can live without water. Water is essential. The psalmist says that his soul, his inmost being, thirsts and pants for God like a deer pants for water. The symbolism of this was not lost to the early church. They actually used this symbolism, this passage, for baptism.

One writing literally says, "In the cooling streams of the baptismal fount they drink deeply of the fount of eternal life." "The symbolism was appropriate," this theologian writes, "because each human life derives from and belongs to God and life can be lived only in relationship with God." "In short," he writes, "human life depends on God." Again, we talked about saying that your life depends on God is kind of controversial today.

I just want to share a couple key insights from this first part of the Psalm with you. The psalmist is comparing seeking God to seeking and needing water: it is essential. Simply put, life depends on God so here is my question for our first insight from part one: Does our life, does your life, does my life, look like that?

The second insight piggybacks on that. Did you notice the words 'pants' and 'thirst'? This is a sign of absolute desperation, like this deer *has* to get that water! I have been there—I've run races, before, when it's so hot I just need that water to get going. But it is even more than that. It is a desperation. Simply put, how can I say this--God is not supposed to be just a *part* of our lives, but an essential desperate part, actually the whole of our life. So, here is my question for insight two of part one of the psalm: Do we, do you, and do I, thirst or pant for God like this?

It seems like the psalmist is in a bad place. It is almost like he can't go to the temple. We can relate--we cannot go to church right now, but we can still have a relationship with God, even if we're not physically here in the building. It was more than that, though. The author, the psalmist, was saying he cannot have the connection that he wants, the communion, with God. It seemingly is not available. Our last key insight here is that with our relationship with God, there will be times when we seemingly just cannot connect to God. I repeat, that your faith, my faith, our relationship with God, will ebb and flow. There will be times where you really connect with God and there are going to be other times, maybe you're there now, you just cannot connect with God like you used to or feel like you can't at all. The psalmist was there as he was writing Psalm 42 and Psalm 43. Take hope in this today!

Looking at the middle verses in the psalm, it's a very interesting section. Verse 5 is kind of a very famous passage of scripture that you've probably heard before; it's repeated again at the end of this Psalm and then it concludes the prayer which you remember is contained in Psalms 42 and 43. At the end of Psalm 43, at the conclusion of the whole prayer, the verse is repeated again. So it repeats three times in just these two quick Psalms, "Why, my soul, Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God."

Now, let's go back and remember one of our key insights or our last insight from just the first section of this Psalm. We will not always feel like we are connecting with God. There are many times when you feel so close, but there are many times when you're down and struggling. Sometimes we do not feel like we are connecting with God. You know this, but the Christian life is not promised to be pain free and sadness is evident in the Christian life. Remember, the psalmist is saying, 'my soul is struggling at this.' All this is saying is, hey, I am struggling, I am having trouble. I know we do not do that today in church. We say everything is good. Oh, God bless you, brother. Amen, sister, and everything is great! The psalmist is not saying that. He sang, 'I am struggling,' but did you catch this part? He says he needs to and will put his hope in God and praise him. Wow! So, both light and dark, struggle and hope--coming from the same person. Now he is going to put his hope in God. What does that mean? It means what is he *not* putting his hope in. What he is not putting his hope in is his circumstances or his money.

Frankly, anything other than God leads us to our key question from part two of the Psalm, another key insight: What is your hope in? Where or what is your help? I was not going to do this part, but I have to say it. If you don't know where your help is or you say, "Oh yeah, it's God," here's my challenge: Look at your financial records and look at your calendar--that's where your hope is. You see, I have heard it said to me and I've used that excuse with others, "Oh, my hope is in God!" But you know what? If you look at my calendar and my phone, my hope, my priorities are in a lot of other things!

Verse 6 says, "6 My soul is downcast within me; therefore, I will remember you from the land of the Jordan..." As I study this and look at what a theologian has written about this, then we know it is articulated hope and despair at the same time. That we cannot escape this inevitable reality is demonstrated by Jesus. This passage, verse six, about my soul is downcast within me, is actually reiterated later on in scripture, by Jesus in his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. In Matthew 26:36, He said to his disciples "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." So, Jesus is both struggling and is giving hope at the same time.

It gives us help today. Even Jesus was having a tough time as he basically quotes this Psalm in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The same as the psalmist, I am struggling but I'm putting my hope in God. Hope and despair can come from the same person at the same time. In this amazing Psalm 42, verse seven says, "Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me." Waves and breakers are literally sweeping over the psalmist. It made me think of Niagara Falls. I've been there and you see the power of the waves and you realize, wow, water is powerful, that that is an overwhelming source of power. It's kind of funny to again study a little more from a couple of theologians. They mentioned the fact that this scarcity of water was the thing with the beginning of the psalm; remember the deer was panting for the water. Now the psalm centers on an overabundance of water and he's feeling overwhelmed by it. Ironic! But here's my key question for you for part 3, have you been there, are you there, where you are overwhelmed, drowning, so to speak? Have you felt that way? I know in times in my life I've felt completely overwhelmed. It's not hypothetical or in my past. In the last four months, between the news and the stress of being home and everything, I felt overwhelmed. I feel like I'm drowning, so to speak. If you feel that way or you know someone who is going through that, check out the last couple verses of this passage, verse 9.

Instead of making things less complicated though I have to be honest with you. It makes it more complicated! “I say to God my Rock, “Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?” Did you catch that? Literally, the psalmist is saying that God is his rock in one sentence--that is a good thing, and using, “Why has the rock forgotten me?” in the next sentence. Then he describes the pain and warning in the following verse. It seems like he is really strongly going back and forth. He is good, He's bad. God is great, God is a rock, but why have you forgotten me? He's overwhelmed, he might be on the verge of hopelessness, being overwhelmed, and then the psalmist comes back to that passage, that phrasing that we talked about, and concludes the whole prayer at the end of Psalm 43, “Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”

He comes back to that the second time in Psalm 42 and the third time overall at the end of the prayer. What do you take away from that? Here is a key insight for part three. We need to keep reminding ourselves again and again to put our hope in God. *We need to keep reminding ourselves to put our hope in God!* It's a daily decision To put our hope in God and not in the things that will crumble daily, more like minute by minute in *my* life! You might say, “Mark, if I have to constantly remind myself to put my hope in God over and over hundreds of times a day, because I'm really struggling, isn't that like elementary? Is it not like an infant? Is not like “baby steps” of the faith?”

There is a great movie. It is an old movie; I realize it's 30 years old. It's “What about Bob” and features Bill Murray and Richard Dreyfuss. In it, Murray plays this guy named Bob Wiley, this unstable guy who befriends Doctor Leo Marvin, played by Dreyfus. His family is on vacation and it goes all haywire for Bob. At their first meeting, Bill Murray's character comes up to him and he is so panicked, he can't even do basic things, like walk to the bathroom or walk to the stairs. Richard Dreyfuss's character, the doctor, says, “Baby steps, Bob, baby steps, Bob.” So the whole time Bob keeps saying “baby steps” to the elevator, “baby steps” to the subway, and he just baby steps for, like, fifteen minutes: It's hysterical! It's kind of like that when we have to concentrate, to remind ourselves over and over again, it's “baby steps”. But that's not a negative because eventually you get to where you are going.

I had a teacher and seminary professor and she wrote this 253-page theological book. I had a meeting with her, and I said, “How do you write a book? That seems daunting to me. I get tired after, like, five pages.” Anyway, she said to me, “One page at a time, Mark.” Baby steps, baby steps.

What do we take away from this psalm? I want to leave you with just three ideas. Just to reiterate what we talked about from part one, Does your life truly depend on God? Essentially like that deer needs water, like human beings need water, do you truly thirst for God, does your life look like that?

The second one, part two, is, Where is your help today? What do you put your hope in today? if you're not sure where you put your hope today, check your calendar, your finances. That will tell you where you put your hope.

Third, are you feeling overwhelmed, like you are drowning, like the psalmist was? Do you need to just be reminded again (and maybe you do), just to put your hope in God all the time, not just once a day, every time! When you fall flat on your face like Bob did in the movie, “baby steps”! Pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and remind yourself, put your hope in God and keep doing that one page at a time. The Psalm 42 psalmist is struggling, but he has put his hope in God. That should be the same for you and me. Amen, and thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers of the People - Rich Rej

Dear God in heaven above, So often we rely on our own resources to get through the day. We tend to look to what we can do before we come to you and let's be honest, by the time we come to you, things can sometimes be a little messy. Help us, Lord, from this moment on to come to you first. Help us, Lord, to be so dedicated and devoted to you that we reach out to you in prayer to start our day, at the end of our day, and throughout the day. Help us, Lord, to see you hiding in plain sight all around us in the beauty of a Michigan summer day and your creation that surrounds us and provides for us. Grant us the strength, Lord, to protect and defend all of your creation, and to work to bring about Shalom on this earth. Dear Lord, please remind us that whatever we are in the middle of today that we're not in it alone now. We can always come to you in prayer, that we can bring our concerns, our worries, and our sorrows to you and that we can and should bring our joys, our happiness. Fill us with the peace that passes all understanding, Lord, as we place our hopes in you, that we might trust in you and your plans for us, that we might fully understand that your plans are for us to prosper, to not be harmed, and that you grant us hope in the future. Father, we ask you to bless our church and church family. Please be with Emily and Mark and the entire staff as they lead us forward during these uncertain times. Father, we ask you to hear these prayers along with the prayers we say throughout the week when we spend our time with you.

We ask all these things in the name of your son, our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ, as we come to you praying the words your son gave us, saying, *Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

Benediction - Rev. Hovermale

May you choose today to put your hope in God, regardless of your circumstance, and look at God as an essential part of your life and seek after him. May the blessing of God the Father and Jesus Christ be with you and yours, forever more. Amen.