

“Out of the Depths”

Psalm 130

Dec. 15, 2024 (Adv. 3-C)

St. Paul’s Lutheran, North Freedom

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.

If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins. (Psalm 130, NIV84)

Dear fellow watchers of Christ’s Advent:

“Help me, Mommy! I can’t get out!” A little girl had gone running off by herself in the woods. She got lost and fell into a big pit, way too deep for her to climb out of. Mom, who had been frantically look for her lost child, heard her cries for help and came to the pit. “I’m here, sweetie! Hang on, I can’t get you out, but I’m calling someone to help you get out.” She phoned the fire department, and within minutes they came and rescued the girl from that scary trap.

Psalm 130 is a prayer that’s a lot like that little girl’s cry for help. “Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.” It is something that we too can pray when we feel trapped, down, and in the depths. **Out of the Depths** we call to the Lord; **Out of the Depths** we wait in hope.

There are numerous times when we may feel we’re in the depths, “down in the dumps,” so to speak. More than a quarter of Americans wrestle with anxiety, daily pressures put on us. Slightly less than a quarter of Americans suffer from depression, feeling down; they’re in a hole and struggle to get out. When we feel severe pain, physically and emotionally, we may spiral into the depths of despair, and may even feel like we’re separated from God.

That’s a condition that can be all too real. The prophet Isaiah pointed out what separates us from God: “Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear” (Isa. 59:2). It appears that the writer of Psalm 130 realized that too. “If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?” If God had a computer tracking each sin, wouldn’t that frighten us? Imagine the numbers piling up: “You took God’s name in vain at 8:03 this morning; you snapped at your spouse at 8:04; you had an envious thought at 8:05....” We’d lose track of all our sins, and God knows more sins we’re not even aware of. How could we stand before the all-knowing, holy God with the track record of sins in our lives?

No wonder we call out to the LORD “out of the depths,” in a big hole of sin that we can’t lift ourselves out of. All we can do is cry out for mercy and pray that the LORD will hear our voices for help, and be attentive to our miserable plight.

But now we remember something that lifts us up: “But with you there is forgiveness.” The Lord has forgiveness! The picture of forgiveness here is that of a pardon a president gives. The Lord says to you and me, “You were charged of these sins and found guilty, but I’m going to erase that from your record, give you clean slate, and you will be found not guilty!” It so happens that the Lord took care of that already when he sent his Son Jesus to be born of a virgin, placed in a manger,

all so that he could live a full life without sin, and then be charged with our sins and suffer death in our place. Jesus has come; with him there is forgiveness!

Fear not! The Lord has heard our calls for mercy, our cries for his help. Actually, there is a fear that we have after hearing of his forgiveness: “Therefore you are feared.” We will fear the Lord—not one of terror, but one of reverence, of awe, at how great God is and how loving he is to wipe out the slate of sins that caused us to be in such a big pit in our lives. The awe of Christmas is expressed by Jesus: “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:17). How awesome! God himself has come to lift us up from our muck of sinfulness and tell us, “You are forgiven!” That lifts us up out of the depths!

Yet, as long as we are in this fallen world and live in our sin-saturated bodies, we are still in that sense “in the depths.” But knowing that God has forgiven us, we wait in hope for the full redemption, the full freedom of being God’s children that is to come. The psalmist writes, “I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope.” We have that sure hope in God’s Word, his promises that tell us, “The Lord is with you. Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. Behold, I am coming soon” (Luke 1:28; Heb. 13:5; Rev. 22:12).

Sometimes we think we can fix our own problems. We’re like an amateur handyman who overestimates his own knowledge and finds out his attempts to fix the problem just make it bigger. When we’re in a hole, in the depths, don’t try to dig yourself out on your own. “Wait for the LORD.” Put your hope, your trust, in his Word, in his promises.

The psalmist compared his waiting to a watchman who waits for the morning. Being a night watchman can be a long, lonely job; the time ticks by too slowly, it’s a struggle to keep awake. It seems like the dawn will never come. Does it seem like our waiting for the Lord to come is like that watchman waiting for the morning? But as surely as dawn breaks each morning, so also our Lord will come. Be patient, be still: The Lord will return when it’s the right time.

We put our hope in the LORD, “for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption.” “Unfailing love” is part of the LORD’s name that he spoke to Moses: “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Ex. 34:6). The love of God is gracious—undeserved; his love is faithful, it never fails.

That unfailing love leads to “full redemption.” “He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.” “Redeem” means “to buy back,” and we know that our Lord Jesus has paid the price for everyone’s sins. “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins,” Paul wrote (Eph. 1:7). “Full redemption” is setting us free from all the entanglements of sin: From the sorrows of this world, from pain, from temptation and from death itself. When our Lord Jesus comes again, he will bring this full redemption; we will be set free eternally!

When you’re feeling in the depths, when you feel like you’re at rock bottom, you have nowhere to look but up. So look up! Your Lord, Jesus, has removed your sins. He is coming again to lift you out of the depths to the greatest heights. Jesus tells us what our response will be when he comes: “When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:28). Amen.