

“Becoming the Best You Can Be”

Psalm 130
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First Presbyterian Church
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There’s an old *Peanuts* cartoon that has Charlie Brown sitting at Lucy’s psychiatric booth, the one with the famous banner, “Psychiatric Help, 5¢”. After Lucy dispenses one of her typically twisted diagnoses, Charlie Brown is left sitting there, head in his hands. With a sad look on his face, he cries out to heaven above, saying, “Where do I go to give up?”

“Where do I go to give up?” It’s a question many of us have asked. You know, when you’ve tried everything and find yourself at the end of your rope. Nothing seems to help. Problems are closing in on you, and they just seem insurmountable. “Where do I go to give up?” Or as the Psalmist says, “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.”

Actually, those are two very different places to stand when faced with overwhelming troubles that just won’t go away. One problem gets resolved and another pops up. You find yourself stuck in a seemingly endless cycle of tragedy and despair. At such times it’s important to know that there’s a difference between giving up and looking up, looking up to heaven and asking God for help, asking God to remove the things that have gotten between you and your heart’s desire, the goal that would bring you closer to the fullness who God created you to be, mind, body and soul.

So much that blocks us from our true potential, from becoming our true selves inside and out, so much of what gets in the way is of our own making. The choices we make – great and small – can either ease our way forward or derail us all together, with little or no progress in that area of life.

And yet, in God’s gracious mercy, we are made to blossom fully with purpose and resolve. Did you recognize that statement? It’s something I often say in response to our Prayer of Confession.

Today we are going to look at those things that get in the way of our blossoming fully with purpose and resolve, those things that are in our power to overcome, with God’s help.

Of course, I'm talking about all the unfortunate little habits we have, the misguided choices we make, the sinful impulses we let run our lives. For example, think of the kid who used to pray every day for a bike. When he grew up, he realized that God doesn't work that way. So, he stole a bike and then prayed for forgiveness. Now that's someone who needs to learn a thing or two about sin and forgiveness.

Today's Old Testament lesson is just such an opportunity to learn about sin and forgiveness, despair and hope, tragedy and triumph. The Psalmist, who tradition tells us was Israel's King David, cries out to the Lord from the depths of despair.

We've all been there before, right? You feel like your life is a living hell – as in the depths of hell. Or we sometimes feel like we've been swallowed up by the sea, the pressure of the ocean pushing down on us, as in the depths of the sea, the depths of despair.

What is it that had you feel like that? Whatever it is, there's one thing certain. You felt like you had zero control over the situation; maybe you feel like that now. That's the feeling we want to look at today, the feeling of being powerless over a life situation that's holding you back.

When you feel there is nothing you can do to change your life for the better, to get past the barriers between you and your goal, your heart's desire, the truth is, there is something you can do.

To discover what that something is – what you can do – you have to get out of our own way and allow God to come alongside you and strengthen and guide you. With God by your side, there is nothing you can't do, if it be God's will, right? Right.

You know what it is that gets between us and God? It's our sinful nature, our head-strong ways. This blocks us from being who God created us to be, whether that's a healthier you, a certain job or career, a true sense of belonging, or whatever it is that is your heartfelt calling in life.

King David, as powerful as he was, recognized that he was his own worst enemy, saying, "If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?" David knows that there are sinful, misguided aspects of his life that get in the way

of who God created him to be. He knows that his sinful nature – if allowed to lead the way – only brings heartache, despair and tragedy.

So David turns to the Lord, admitting his sinful, head-strong ways and embracing God's desire to forgive and forget, saying, "But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered." And there we have it – the key insight from today's scripture lesson is to seek forgiveness, not for our sake, but so that the Lord may be revered and glorified, through us, through your success.

When we seek forgiveness for our sake and our sake alone, we fall right back into sin, right back into a cycle of making wrong choices, trying to do better, falling short, repenting, and repeat – wrong choice, try harder, fall short, repent and repeat.

It's so hard to make a real change in life! And in fact, if we make it only about us and what we want, we're bound to fail. But if we make it about God, make it about our love of God, our love of family, our love of community, then we cannot fail, we will make progress, we will succeed.

When David was at his lowest, the first thing he did was to identify and admit his weakness, his sin, his iniquity. Next, he acknowledged the Lord's presence in his life, God's desire to forgive and forget. And then, he waited. He waited and watched for the Lord to show him the way forward, the way to get past his barriers in life. "I wait for the Lord," says David, "my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning."

Can't you just tell how powerless David feels, and how hopeful and faithful he is, even in the midst of his despair. I mean, he's really lost. He has no idea what to do, how to move forward. But he does know the Lord. He knows the Lord's desire to forgive and forget, and in that space of forgiveness, to create something new. That's the Lord's desire for you, too, to do a new thing in your life.

Now of course, making space for something new and giving it time to emerge takes time. Becoming a new creation in any area of life doesn't happen overnight. And this is why we have to keep God at the forefront of our efforts. If we make it about us and us alone, we won't have the patients and commitment needed to succeed.

We're just not that patient with ourselves, not patient like David, as he waited and waited and waited, watched and watched – watched for the Lord to give him direction, to give him strength, to give him encouragement and reassurance.

When we make it only about us, we're usually either very committed but not very patient, or very patient but not really committed. There's something we'd kinda, maybe like to accomplish, but our commitment is weak and we're willing to wait a lifetime or longer, and of course nothing gets done.

Or there's something we really are committed to, but when it doesn't happen quick enough, we lose patience and give up. In either scenario, not much happens, and that's where most people live. And that's OK; that's a valid choice. But, if you really want to make a difference in some area of your life, make it about God, and not about you. I mean, it's easy to let ourselves down. But if we make it about God, we somehow have the commitment and the patience to keep trying, to make progress, little by little.

The Lord dearly desires to create something new in your life – a healthier you, for those focused on their health; a stronger spirit for those trying to overcome bad habits; a more faithful soul for those seeking God as a partner in your future success.

Whatever breakthrough you need in life, it all begins with getting right with God, getting right with yourself, and getting right with that community that's there to support you. Neither David nor the nation of Israel made quick progress toward becoming who God created them to be. But they never lost faith. They always repented of their misguided ways and turned back to the Lord for guidance and strength. And so should we.

Whatever's getting in your way, turn it over to the Lord, lean on him to bring you through, to give you new hope, new possibilities, a new reality you can't even see or imagine right now, the new you that God is preparing even now to bring into being.

As David said, "... With the Lord, there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. It is he who will redeem (you) from all ... iniquities," it is God who will guide and strengthen you to become the best you can be. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Wondrous and generous God, your gifts are overwhelming: Your sun lights the way for our journey, and your stars puncture our darkness. Your living water quenches our thirst, and your broken bread opens the door to eternal life. Your healing touch binds up our wounds, and your forgiveness washes clean our sin.

Wondrous and generous God, from the four corners of the earth, a chorus of praise erupts. The ocean roars and the trees shout their joy. From the deepest depths of our being, our prayer gropes to find words of adoration.

For you are patient and kind, even as we wander, lured by the trivial and attracted by the quick solution. For you are full of compassion and truth, even as we stumble in relationships and hesitate at the doors of justice.

Come now, wondrous and generous God. Surprise those whose days are filled with sameness and whose joy has ceased.

Bring comfort to those who agonize over broken relationships, who mourn the death of what used to be.

Come now, wondrous and generous God. Liberate those whose distractions and addictions rob them of their full potential.

Make this church a place where seeds grow, joy is shared, songs are sung, peace is shaped, dreams are born, sorrow is graced and ripples of love spread.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Chris, our Lord and Savior, who taught us to pray together, 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.