

Real Life

Psalm 1

Luke 6:17-26

ROOTEDNESS

You might remember the lines from a Robert Frost poem that are often repeated, “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I, I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.”¹

Psalm 1 is similar imagery of a well-lived life in choosing the way of the tree by the water that is deeply rooted in the source of life and if you choose this way you will have a meaningful life. This first Psalm is the doorway, the introduction to the rest of the Psalms which are full of complexity and were used much like we use our hymn books. The Psalms give permission for people to cry out to God, to question God, to blame God? The full range of human emotions as life is experienced is represented in the Psalms. Over two-fifths of the Psalms are laments pouring out from the depths of what someone has experienced or is experiencing.

Most Psalms will also remember the goodness of God in the past, God’s faithfulness and plead for God to show up now and voice hope and trust that things will change. Psalm 22 is one that has the whole range of, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me and the book of hymns we use, Voices Together has a hymn that is directly from Psalm 22. VT 696, “*My God My God* would you forsake me, why keep your help so far away. I called by day and hear no answer, at night I groan who hears me pray? Yet you are holy, throned in praises, Your saints invoke your mighty name and you deliver them from evil, they trust and are not put to shame.”

VT 696 are words of real life that are sung together in community and become living words of our flesh. We are bodily people here on earth experiencing what we are experiencing together remembering that Jesus came and walked among us as the Word made flesh, experiencing life with us and we now as a community of faith can embody what we are going through together as we offer authentic cries for help, longing for hope and gratefulness for deliverance now and in the future.

“*My God, My God* VT 696 was sung by a congregation that I was in where they were at their depths and there weren’t any real answers yet to the trauma that had happened within the congregation. Hearing voices sing this cry from Psalm 22 was a very moving experience for me. It was as if *we* had become the liturgy offered to God that morning. I hope you can understand the difference there that we weren't just

¹ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44272/the-road-not-taken>

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2/23/25

Luann Yutzy

reading words or singing words, we had *become the words* because this was our life right then being offered in song.

It rooted that congregation. Even though people were at different places they were rooted in being able to express shock and grief and sing “My God, where are you?”

People are asking how do we get through this time, right now? The turbulent and traumatic times right now. A question as old as time. For some it has been hard to believe this is now our life. Not everyone will feel the same impact in our country. Some really feel the changes that have been made. Besides recent political changes, there may be trauma that we hold in our lives or loss or times that feel really dry, the drought has been a long time in some of our lives.

In the Luke passage today, Luke 6, Jesus looks us in the eyes today right where we are. He sees the poor and the hungry ones, he sees the tears. Jesus meets them (and there were many from surrounding regions) on a level place in Luke’s gospel. It is not on the mountain but Jesus has come down to where they are on the plain. We could imagine that around here. Maybe Jesus was praying up on Coronado Heights and he chose the disciples and came down to all the people gathered from Salina, Lindsborg, McPherson, even Goessel. They had all heard of his healing power and they needed to be healed and it says, power came out from him and he healed them *all*.

He saw the hunger in their eyes, the sorrow. He saw them in their bodies, not trying to spiritualize their situation. Here in Luke it is the poor, those in poverty, not poor in spirit as it is in Matthew’s version. The poor are those who are scraping by from day to day. They know what it’s like to be emptied. Blessed are you. It is obvious Jesus has a soft place in his heart for the poor. Jesus came from a poor family too. The temple sacrifice Mary and Joseph gave was a pair of turtledoves. They didn’t have much earthly wealth. Jesus on that level place in Luke 6, saw the people in their real lives.

He talked about blessings and woes, which isn't really giving advice or judgment. He was addressing the people who stood in front of him. Jesus was leveling with us all that this is how life is. We gravitate between this way and that way and we go toward the blessing when we can empty ourselves and remember that we need God and we sometimes head toward the woes when we have so much of our own independence and individualism that we are just fine, we can buy anything we need and we may forget God. This is simply the truth about how life is and we stand on this level plain together.

REORIENTATION ALONG THE WAY

In Luke after the blessings and woes, Jesus says for those of you who are still listening, (sermons can get like that too- are you still listening?) love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those

Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church

2/23/25

Luann Yutzy

who persecute you. It isn't just a bouncing back and forth between blessing and woe and trying to remember being rooted in God, Jesus is calling us to a constant reorientation, repentance, turn around- (which road am I to be on?), constant reorientation to the kingdom living of Jesus compared to the kingdom living of this world. This kind of reorientation takes a kind of faith stage that isn't trying to change other people but focuses on changing ourselves and using what we have for others.

We are deeply rooted in the source of life when we stand in the crowd together. I have seen churches that have food pantries in their fellowship hall every Thursday for anyone to come and take what the community has given. Restaurants and stores gave food, vegetable farmers gave of their produce. Fresh food was offered. The people would line up in front of my office window hours before the church doors would open for them to come in and take food for their family. It took tremendous organization and planning and it was the way of the kingdom being with and ministering to the ones who were hungry right then in real life. Someday we could be the hungry ones.

If we aren't the poor right now, we are called to minister by volunteering at homeless shelters like you do or a soup kitchen like you do, giving time to run errands for someone who doesn't have transportation. I have seen faith communities who have a very small budget give ESL classes to people on a weeknight and even though they had little money, tears and laughter and joy were visible in their Sunday morning services.

When I took a rather large youth group some years ago to a very small congregation to have a different worship experience the pastor hadn't told me it would be a potluck Sunday and I'm sure some could have groaned at seeing these hungry teenagers spilling into their little church. I saw someone leave during the sermon and come back with a lot of KFC, buckets of chicken, and the welcome was wide to all of us strangers and we didn't sit at our own tables; we were invited to sit among them and they blessed us with their food.

We are to try to stay rooted in God and we are constantly reorienting ourselves to the kingdom of Jesus that is so different from what we see. As we travel on this road we have chosen, we are also hit by high winds and frigid temperatures and heat, extreme heat that is just a part of life. Our bodies are in it with us. We are in our bodies. We sometimes don't tune into being in our bodies as we go.

EMBODY IN OUR BODY

We experience trauma (little or big- you get to decide) in our bodies in many ways and something I learned as a hospital chaplain in the emergency room was to help people work with the energy of the

Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church

2/23/25

Luann Yutzy

trauma that was trapped inside of them. We would walk and stand and sit and stand as they waited on their loved one in the trauma room. If you find yourself at any time in your life filled with trauma, sudden trauma, gradual trauma, trauma of what's happening around us now- get up and move. Dance it off. Walk it off. Shake it off. Shake your hands. Join a group. Join the choir. Join the exercise class. It doesn't mean it will totally leave you but it is true that trauma, even incremental trauma in us has to go out somewhere

and we can move our body, do something different to relieve some of it. It can be easy to just hold it in. Notice our bodies. Take care of ourselves so we can take care of others.

Transitional pastors have to work with this too. You would probably laugh at the picture of Robert and me when we were working in a pretty tough conflicted situation and practically after every tense Council meeting we would come home and turn on some very loud music and we would dance off the energy from the meeting in the kitchen. We were close enough to neighbors that I think they could see us but they never ever mentioned that.

This is in another state, of course.

Ritual may need to become an even larger part of our communal worship together and our everyday life as part of our rootedness. Bringing our human experience right now in our faith community will be the living liturgy that we offer to God. It won't just be words on a page it will be our lives as we are experiencing them expressed in our singing, our reading scripture together, letting the psalms wash over us and become a part of us, in our study together, our questions, our doubts, our eating together, remembering the bread of life and the cup of blessing of communion and sometimes the chocolate and the fruit as a ritual of remembering together.

Bring our bodies along as we experience our lives, the ups and downs. Rituals at home with our families or friends will keep us rooted. Camping in the backyard on the first day of summer could become a ritual. Do something new together. Pay attention in a way you haven't before. There are sounds in nature that we can hear if we listen for a long time. What is so important that we can't slow down and pause to see the wonder of God around us? We can read a psalm as the sun rises, or as the sun sets.

All of these rituals and rhythms help us stay rooted and grounded as life happens, some together and some alone. You will find new rituals that are meaningful.

Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church

2/23/25

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ROOTED TOGETHER

So, I like to envision not one tree by the water deeply rooted but many trees, whether they are by the water or deeply rooted to the aquifer below and they stand together, not alone. We are a community of faith that experiences high points and low points and have different points of need as we journey together.

Together we do the hard practice of reorienting, turning back toward the call of being people of a different kingdom, pouring out what we hold in here as we worship together and we stay rooted, knowing we are loved and we are not alone.

May your rootedness have space to grow into new streams of water that bring life to old ways or into new ways that are just new. May you be looking for something *fresh* and *needed* and *new* and the wisdom and wonder to know what that will be. May the Spirit be your guide.