

Scripture: Book of Job, Psalm 130

Our theme for today is crying out. What does crying out to God mean to you and for us as God's people? When I think of crying out, as Job does and as we see in many of the Psalms, I think of crying out in anguish, frustration, anger, crying out from the depths of despair. But there are two sources of that anguish, humans and God. We are angry with ourselves or something that has been done to us by others. There is also crying out because we are angry with God or very confused with something perceived to have come from God. We cry out and at God. And God can take it.

Is anyone here familiar with the phenomenon known as the afterschool meltdown? Those of you who have or had school age children or grandchildren may be familiar. You may also be familiar with a similar condition called the after work blues. The hallmarks of both ailments are the ability to hold it together during the day, the ability to be successful and competent at work or the ability to participate fully in the school day, get along with classmates, follow the teacher's instruction. Generally, a person is a well-mannered citizen at school or work. However, when that same child comes home, they have saved their "best" behaviour for their parents, for their families. Then the meltdown comes, the crying, the exhaustion, the frustration with the day; it all comes out. It all comes out at home. And you know what, it's okay. That is the role of a parent, of a family, of a home. Home is our refuge from the day. Home is where we can cry out in safety and security. That's why children save their best behaviour for their parents and families. We are their refuge, we are the place of the safety. We are their home.

Just as God is our refuge, our home. God can handle our afterschool meltdowns, our cries of anguish and despair. That's why I chose this hymn. It has become a favourite of mine. The idea that we can take refuge in God; the idea that God is my home is a powerful one. "O God our refuge is your love, no fear can take us captive when we follow your courageous lamb, then leap the walls, amen, amen!" If you read the information in the hymnal about the lyrics of this hymn, you see that they are taken from the testimonies of the Anabaptist martyrs in the 16th century, specifically songs and testimonies written by women martyrs Anna Jansz and Martha Baert. Can you picture the women, in prison, crying out to anyone who would listen? There is a story of Anna when she is arrested, pleading in the town centre for someone to adopt her infant son and raise him to be a good Christian so they will be reunited in heaven. Can you imagine? So much crying...Crying out to God, to the religious authorities, to fellow Anabaptists, to their children? And yet...God is their refuge, their home. Crying out to God will help them leap the prison walls. God is stronger and bigger than anything our human minds can fathom. Where we are afraid or see despair, God does not. I wonder too about the parallels between the Anabaptist martyrs and the book of Job. Surely both Job and the Martyrs had great reason to cry out in anguish and despair but both also cry out in faith and hope.

Job says in chapter 7, verse 11 "But I won't keep quiet; I will speak in the adversity of my spirit, groan in the bitterness of my life." Job cannot keep quiet in the face of his trials and adversity. Job must cry out. He cannot refrain from moaning about the bitterness of his situation, but neither can he refrain extolling the strength, majesty and mystery of God. In chapter 9, Job says things like, God is wise and powerful, he moves mountains and commands the sun. Job has a lot to say, a lot of crying out to do. But even in his crying out, in his fear and anguish, he

falls back on the mystery of God. And indeed, when from the whirlwind God answers Job's cries, God says twice to Job "prepare yourself like a man" (38:3 and 40:7). These two commands book end God's detailed description of God's power. God is highlighting the differences between Job, a human and God, not a human but God. Job understands that God's wonders are beyond his comprehension. The mystery is the point. And where there is mystery there is beauty, but there is also darkness, confusion and frustration at a lack of understanding. What is this mystery of God? Why is suffering happening? Why do bad things happen to good people?

We are not God, we are human like Job. We can also cry out as did Job. We don't need to keep quiet in our adversity. We can be like Job. We can cry out like the Anabaptist martyrs. No matter how many melt downs, angry temper tantrums, anguished cries we throw at God. God is our refuge. God is our home.

In the book of Job, chapter 4, Job's friend Eliphaz thinks he's figured it all out. He says, "As I've observed, those who plow sin and sow trouble will harvest it." Similarly in chapter 8, Job's friend Bildad thinks he has the explanation and answer to Job's cries. He says, "If you are pure and do the right thing, then surely he will become active on your behalf and reward your innocent dwelling." They both offer a simple accounting. Sin results in trouble and doing the right thing results in reward. But Job knows it's not so simple. Job is sitting in the dark parts of the mystery. There is no easy accounting for Job. Job, like the psalmist in Psalm 130, cries "out to you from the depths, Lord". The psalmist also pleads with God "my Lord, listen to my voice!" (v 2). The writer cries out at God, begs him to listen to his prayers. But the psalmist also goes on to say, "If you kept track of sins, Lord-my Lord, who would stand a chance? But

forgiveness is with you-. He cries out at God but also rests in the hope of God's forgiveness. Like Job remains faithful throughout his ordeal, we too can love and rage at God. We too can remain faithful and also be confused and frustrated with God.

I am reminded of the cry of the father of the demon-possessed boy in the Gospel of Mark. When Jesus says, "All things are possible for the one who has faith." (Mark 9:23) The father cries out to Jesus, " I have faith; help my lack of faith!" (v. 24). Isn't that what Job takes 30 chapters to say? Isn't that what many of our cries to God are about? I believe but I'm also confused or frustrated. I believe but I don't understand. I have faith but I don't know what that means. I believe God is good and God is love but also really bad things are happening in the world and I don't what to do about it. I don't know what God is doing about it. Ultimately, if we are angry and crying out at God, we believe in God. We wouldn't get this mad at a God we don't believe in. Being mad at God is not reflection of a lack of faith. It isn't for Job or the psalmist and it isn't for us.

The reason young children often save their meltdowns for the people who love them most is because they know that they can fully trust that their unpleasant behaviour can never change their family's love for them. God is not shaken by our anger. Our crying out can never change God's love for God's people. God is not keeping an account the way Job's friends suggest. But rather it is like the psalmist says, "faithful love is with the Lord; because great redemption is with our God!" (ps 130: 7).

We can take all our burdens, all our rejoicing, all our anger, our despair, our worship and our thanksgivings to God. We can cry out in anguish and joy. We can trust that God's love bears all things.