

“Put your trust in God;”

Psalm 43.5

- 1 Give judgment for me, O God,
and defend my cause against an ungodly people; *
deliver me from the deceitful and the wicked.
- 2 For you are the God of my strength;
why have you put me from you? *
and why do I go so heavily while the enemy oppresses me?
- 3 Send out your light and your truth, that they may lead me, *
and bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling;
- 4 That I may go to the altar of God,
to the God of my joy and gladness; *
and on the harp I will give thanks to you, O God my God.
- 5 Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul? *
and why are you so disquieted within me?
- 6 Put your trust in God; *
for I will yet give thanks to him,
who is the help of my countenance, and my God.

Good morning, St. Dunstan's!

Who remembers the early 1980's? Was anyone here around Houston at this time?

A major phenomenon hit the entire country inspired by a movie... Urban Cowboy.

Drugstore cowboys and cowgirls were showing up all around the country, even all around the world. Ruffled prairie skirts, Ropers and Wranglers- roper boots and Wrangler jeans, and pheasant feathered hatbands were everywhere. Right?

One crazy thing I remember about this time was all the personal monogramming. Men not only had a monogrammed shirt at the cuff, but some also monogrammed their shirt pockets and if that wasn't enough, initials were stitched on their starched jeans down by the boots. Names were hand-tooled on the back of belts with initials engraved on giant belt buckles. That was a lot of personalizing.

Personalizing.

Our Psalms is similar in the way of personalizing. Psalm 43 only has 5 verses, yet the personal pronouns of **me, my, and I** are used 17 times.

What does that tell us? This psalm is very personal. It exudes feelings from the heart.

The Psalter, another name for the book of Psalms, is divided into five major collections or “books.” Psalm 42 marks the beginning of the second book of the Psalms, which ends with Psalm 72. This includes psalms related to David, to the Sons of Korah, and to Aseph.

Psalm 43 is actually the conclusion of Psalm 42.

What???

In many translations of the Bible, what we know as Psalm 43 is numbered as part of Psalm 42, Therefore, in order to understand our for today Psalm 43, it is necessary to read Psalm 42.

They share common themes.

They form a single poem where the psalmist longs to be in the presence of God.

It was probably written by a priest or Levite who was far from the temple, probably in exile.

Therefore, this is a psalm of individual lamentation.

Lamentation means the passionate expression of grief or sorrow.

If you read them together you will get what is sometimes called a sandwich Psalm.

Psalm 42 begins talking about the soul:

“As a deer pants for water,
so, my soul longs after you, O God.

and Psalm 43 ends talking about the soul.

Right now, I'm reading a book which speak about life and soul by theologian Richard Rohr.

Richard Rohr's *Falling Upward* discusses the 2 halves of life.

In the first half of life -

(which doesn't necessarily mean chronologically because some young folks have learned from early on hardship and some older people remain quite childish)

He says that in the first half of life we are preoccupied with establishing who we are, our identity, starting our own homes, managing careers, building relationships, finding community, and establishing some type of financial security.

We discover what draws us in and connects us **or** what repels us and why we feel that way.

In the second half of our journey, we must learn from failure and falling. Together they help with our personal and spiritual growth. Failure and falling serve for an immense purpose and a valuable part of our life.

Rohr says,

“The soul has many secrets. They are only revealed to those who want them and are never completely forced upon us. One of the best kept secrets, and yet one hidden in plain sight is ‘the way up is the way down. ‘

This pattern is obvious in all of nature.”

Speaking of the way down, has anyone noticed the temperatures dropping at night?

Cooler nights indicate to nature that a sacrifice of change is occurring. The leaves of autumn will soon start to descend giving way to the stillness of winter for a brief moment- then spring will burst forth and we will start our lovely growth cycle again.

Rohr says, “In legend and literature,

“The sacrifice of something to achieve something else is almost the only pattern.

Sleeping Beauty must sleep for a hundred years before she can receive the kiss from the prince.”

From our own scriptures in Genesis, we find the wrestling and wounding of Jacob are necessary for Jacob to become Israel. And the sacrificial death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus are necessary to give us the gift of love we need to have a relationship with God.

The 'loss and renewal' pattern is constant in life. It should hardly be called a secret.

Our gospel reading today, Jesus talks about differing groups:

the crowds and his disciples and the scribes and the Pharisees.

Matthew 23:3, Jesus says,

“therefore, do whatever they (the scribes and the Pharisees) teach you and follow it;

but do not do as they do, **for they do not practice what they teach.**”

Learn from their teachings but **learn** their mistakes.

Mistakes can teach us so much.

Recently I was visiting with my children. I apologized to them for focusing more on their successes not positively recognizing more of their failures and fallings.

Jesus is encouraging us to learn from our mistakes which we all make. Jesus encourages us to be open to change. As we get older, that is so much harder to do.

Loss and renewal, death and transformation, scarcity to generosity, and constant change is part of the beauty we call life. Falling down to move up is how we grow. Letting go to get more seems counterintuitive. But it is central to our faith.

Anyone here struggle with perfectionism? Whenever I am stressed, I have the desire to sink into perfectionism. I want to do and be perfect in order to hide or deny from my mistakes.

But there is no such thing as human perfection.

Here's what Rohr says on about **imperfection**,

Imperfection “...What a clever place for God to hide holiness, so that only the humble and earnest will find it! A ‘perfect’ person ends up being the one who can consciously forgive and include imperfection rather than one who thinks he or she is totally above and beyond imperfection.

In fact, I would say that the demand for the perfect is the greatest enemy of the good.

Perfection is a mathematical or divine concept,

goodness is a beautiful human concept that includes us all.”

Perhaps, it is time for us, like the psalmist to embrace our imperfection.
Instead of denying pain, the psalmist recognizes what is happening inside the soul.

“Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help and my God.”

These words are repeated 3 times: Psalm 42:5, 42:11 and 43:5.

When we see repetition in scripture, it calls for our attention, beckoning us to listen close.

The psalmist articulates what is happening internally and knows where to turn during this change.

The falling down to get up.

This change, transition, falling downward inspires the hope and praise,

When the falling down happens,

And it does happen,

Like our psalmist, I want to encourage you to hope in God and fall upward.