



Lent reflection for April 4, 2025

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Psalm 71: 1-12

*In you, O Lord, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.
In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
incline your ear to me and save me.
Be to me a rock of refuge,
a strong fortress, to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.*

*Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.
For you, O Lord, are my hope,
my trust, O Lord, from my youth.
Upon you I have leaned from my birth;
it was you who took me from my mother's womb.
My praise is continually of you.*

*I have been like a portent to many,
but you are my strong refuge.
My mouth is filled with your praise,
and with your glory all day long.
Do not cast me off in the time of old age;
do not forsake me when my strength is spent.
For my enemies speak concerning me,
and those who watch for my life consult together.
They say, 'Pursue and seize that person
whom God has forsaken,
for there is no one to deliver.'*

*O God, do not be far from me;
O my God, make haste to help me!*

Today's reflection is from Colleen Lang:

The other night, after a typically long day of work and after my kids fell asleep, I noticed that Trump was giving a presidential address. I hadn't known it was scheduled. Garish and irritating to me, it was first to be offered up on my streaming account at just the time of night when I was eagerly looking to dive headlong into something else entirely, namely, anything that would save me from any further demands on my mind. I quickly kept scrolling. I chose something I couldn't even remember the next day.

I am not proposing that either Hulu or Netflix can serve as my 'rock of refuge' in these trying times. But I do admit to how often I've hoped they would.

There are a set of skills I teach as a therapist for when clients experience what we call an "emotional crisis," defined as a moment of intense emotion that is either triggered by an external crisis itself, and/or itself represents a crisis for how we may want to respond. "Distress tolerance skills" are a set of strategies for tolerating pain that cannot be immediately controlled or changed, without making it worse.

If I were on a cruise with my family and somehow I danced myself off of the side of the ship, I would inadvertently plunge into the cold sea and then, I could choose to scream and flail or even swim after the ship, all of which would dangerously expend my energy and without helpful outcome. My other option is to float. And wait until the ship returns.

I have been in a bit of a rub recently. While I recognize the importance of floating in so many situations, I have struggled myself and with helping clients to honor the difference between 'floating' and passive resignation. Worse, it's been hard to know when 'floating' in acceptance of what we may not be able to directly nor sufficiently control, bleeds into complacency through the kind of inaction that comes from numbness. Numbness that I look for when the day is done, numbness that is predicted as a human coping response to repeated stress. It's been hard to know when floating in the persistent uncertainty of when the ship will return, in cold water and with the threat of marine predators, becomes so exhausting that it instead becomes mentally checking out, maybe even falling asleep there, and invariably, drowning in the very dangers we are trying to cope with.

How, then, does one float in a way that is still active, still engaged, still caring? How do we protect ourselves, and protect ourselves for the purpose of continuing to live in much needed righteousness, without becoming inured? This Psalm, like the other Psalms, is a prayer of both profound dedication and supplication. It is as much a testimony to faith as it is a plea for deliverance, perhaps because in prayer, they are one and the same. And it is clarifying things for me.

How can we truly commit to floating unless we believe we will be saved? While we wait for our own deliverance, whether it be from the sweeping difficulties of the world, personal or family illness or pain, abuse and invalidation, any version of internal or external threat and demand beating down on us, we are destined to be tired. The choppy seas we find ourselves in and the longer it takes for our security to be restored, the harder it becomes to maintain the belief that it will be, and as this Psalm suggests, the more important it is to do so. The Psalmist is at the end of life, without energy, tired and tried. And in addition to exhaustion, the Psalm reflects fear, pleading of God not to forsake nor cast him off, to 'make haste' to help him. Where energy wanes and the threat of surrender to the forces of the 'unjust and cruel' looms large, the plea is to be rescued. Where we are within God and God is within us, the Psalm both reflects faith and asks for the restoration of faith, reminding us that deliverance is both of faith by God and God by faith. And it is the active act of asking, of pleading, in fact, that reflects this faith in the first place, faith that embodies an ongoing commitment to righteousness. What I find particularly inspiring is that when the Psalmist asserts having been a 'portent to many,' he is reminding us that waiting is not a passive act and in particular when it implies continued commitment to God's direction.

Many of us may struggle these days, feeling left out to the violent whims of different versions of the cold sea, with being able to float calmly without the cocoon of numbing. This Psalm seems to beg of us for our prayers to be loud, desperate and even angry if that's what we feel. Because it is the act of prayer, whether or not we choose to seek refuge in streaming services from time to time, that is still active: it is what we do when we know while we wait that we will be saved.



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