



Sermon Transcript
November 29, 2015

A Waiting Community
Psalm 25

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on November 29, 2015, at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio copy of the sermon on CD is available by request at (860) 563-8286. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text
Psalm 25

¹ To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

² O my God, in you I trust;
let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me.

³ Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;
they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

⁴ Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths.

⁵ Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all the day long.

⁶ Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.

⁷ Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!

⁸ Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

⁹ He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

¹⁰ All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

¹¹ For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great.

¹² Who is the man who fears the LORD?

Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.

¹³ His soul shall abide in well-being, and his offspring shall inherit the land.

¹⁴ The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.

¹⁵ My eyes are ever toward the LORD, for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

¹⁶ Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.

¹⁷ The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses.

¹⁸ Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins.

¹⁹ Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me.

²⁰ Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me! Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.

²¹ May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you.

²² Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles.

Introduction

This Advent season, we are going to look at a series of psalms we are calling “Psalms of Advent.” During the course of this next month, we are going to look at Psalm 25, Psalm 72, Psalm 80, Psalm 85 and Psalm 89. Why these psalms? Well often, in liturgical settings, these psalms are connected to and associated with this season of Advent. Their themes point us in many ways to the hope we celebrate in the birth of Jesus. In fact, if you do the Advent Devotional¹ we alluded to earlier in our service, you will notice that each of these psalms are featured throughout the month. Rather methodically, each Sunday, there is a reading from Psalm 25. Each Monday, there is a reading from Psalm 72. Each Tuesday there is a reading from Psalm 80. . . . and so on. Hence, these psalms are appropriately called Psalms of Advent.

Just by way of introduction, the psalms were the early hymnbook of the church. They weren’t just read, they were also sung. I know that I am going to teach from these psalms over the next several weeks, but they are more than truths to be taught. Tim Keller calls the psalms “a medicine chest for the heart.” He writes, “In calling psalms ‘medicine’ I am trying to do justice to what makes them somewhat different from other parts of the Bible. They are written to be prayed, recited, and sung—to be done, not merely to be read.”² So as we look at these psalms this coming month, we are not just coming with intellectual curiosity to discover how these ancient Old Testament psalms connect us to the story of the birth of Christ. Rather, through these psalms, we are going to discover how the birth of Jesus has something to say with the very real issues we face in everyday life. Keller says, “every situation in life is represented in the book of psalms.”³ In other words, this story we tell of Jesus has something to say to your story.

A Waiting Community

The words we associate with Christmas are what I would call “upbeat-kind-of-words.” They are words like “hope” and “peace” and “joy.” The biblical announcements of Christmas capture this overwhelming sense of hope and joy, “*Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.*” Even in secular settings

where the form of Christmas that is observed is not overly religious, the festive mood of the holiday is captured with the familiar greeting “Merry Christmas!”

And yet, when we open up to this first Psalm of Advent, Psalm 25, we don’t find this festive tone we often associate with Christmas. Rather, this first Psalm of Advent is categorized as a psalm of lament. It is a psalm that is painfully honest about the realities and complexities of life. It is a psalm that looks at life, even during this season of hope, and observes that things don’t always shake out the way our simple statements of faith often portray life to be. In Psalm 25:3, we are reminded that “*none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.*” And yet when we look at life often we see many examples of how the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper. And so as we get ready to celebrate this joyful season of Advent, we begin with this psalm of lament, reminding ourselves that we still live in a world filled with suffering. Furthermore, our suffering doesn’t take a holiday. The holiday doesn’t alter our circumstances nor does it make our problems go away.

So out of one side of your mouth you are singing “Joy to the World” and “Peace on earth, good will to men” but out of the other side of your mouth you are painfully aware that you are not feeling it. Your reality doesn’t seem to be corresponding to the hope portrayed in this season of Advent. In fact, because of the complexities your situation presents to you this morning, God may even seem to be somewhat distant and removed from your sight this morning. And so how is Psalm 25 a Psalm of Advent?

Do you know what the key word is for this psalm? Let me warn you, you may not initially like this word. It is the word, “*wait.*” It is repeated three times and I think it is strategically placed two times in the beginning of the psalm and once at the end. In verse 3 we find the sweeping affirmation of faith, “*Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame.*” At the end of verse 5 we discover the constant posture of the faithful who trust in God, “*for you I wait all the day long.*” And then after brining all of “his stuff” and bearing his heart to God through this psalm, with great confidence David takes his stand in verse 21 and with great resolve he concludes, “*May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you.*”

Literally in Hebrew, this word “*wait*” means to “eagerly wait.” I find it interesting that some English translations translate this Hebrew word with the word “*hope.*” It is the *hope* that we have that enables us to *wait* confidently. That is the whole point of the story of Advent. If you do the devotional reading, you will get a heavy dose of what the prophets of old had said about the coming Messiah. But the people had to wait for a

long time before this promise was fulfilled. But in God's timing, it was fulfilled. The Apostle Paul describes God's timing this way in Galatians 4, "*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman.*" And so the message of Christmas to the "waiting community of faith" is that the long anticipated promise of God has come! Therefore, with great hope, we can joyfully and confidently "wait" even when our vision of God is obscured by the complexities of life.

Patricia Sanchez calls Psalm 25, "a psalm for the waiting community." That is what we are; "a waiting community." Paul captures the spirit of Psalm 25 in Romans 8:18-19, "*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.*" So Sanchez summarizes the essence of this psalm by saying, "As it is prayed during Advent, Psalm 25 envelops the waiting community in a confidence that will see it through. In the interim between Jesus' two advents, and despite the complexities and perplexities of life, we have cause for rejoicing. He came; he comes; he will come again."⁴ And so we wait.

As we enter into this Advent season, what can this psalm teach us about what it looks like to "eagerly wait" for God's promises to be fulfilled? What does it look like to "wait" when we are facing hard things? How can I assume a hopeful stance that finds me confidently and joyfully waiting on God even in the mess of life? From this passage, I offer you three thoughts to help us live as "a waiting community" as we simply "wait" on the God who promises to turn sorrow into joy.

Trust In God

Very quickly in this psalm, at the very beginning, we are reminded that "eagerly waiting" on the Lord is simply learning to trust God. This psalm opens with David turning to God in his time of need. "*To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me. Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.*" I am not sure what David is dealing with when he offers this prayer to God. We do know that David faced his fair share of trouble in life. As he turns to trust God in his difficulty, he is praying that his trust in God would not falter.

Last Sunday evening we had our Thanksgiving Fest and we heard a lot of powerful testimonies to God's faithfulness. During this service last week, some people shared some pretty raw things that had taken place in their life. But what I was reminded of in

their testimonies is that trust in God is often developed and formed in the crucible of suffering. In fact suffering often brings us at a crossroads where we have to decide, am I going to turn in trust to God or will I turn away from God? I found a good definition of biblical hope in preparation for this sermon. It went like this, “Biblical hope does not mean wishing for an event to turn out favorably. Hope trusts the Lord’s will and gives the courage to face disappointment.”⁵ That really is the issue here this morning in this psalm. Can I trust God when I can’t make sense of it all?

There are two songs I am familiar with where the refrain “peace on earth” is repeated. One of those songs is written by Bono, the front man for the popular music group U2. The other is the Christmas carol, “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day”, taken from the poem written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Both of these songs were written out of pain. Both of these songs express their pain. But only one leads to trust and hope.

The song “Peace on Earth” written by Bono expresses the pain he felt back in 1998, when in his home country of Ireland, a car bomb, set off by a faction of the Irish Republic Army not only interrupted the peace process, but took the lives of 29 people in Omagh, Ireland. Bono, a man of faith, reflecting back on this song said that this was “the closest I ever came to a crisis of faith.” He confessed, “it was hard to be a believer at that moment and this song is as bitter and as angry a song U2 has ever written.”⁶ I think his faith has been restored, but it doesn’t come out in this song where he sings,

Heaven on Earth, we need it now
I’m sick of all this hanging around
Sick of sorrow, sick of the pain
I’m sick of hearing again and again
That there’s gonna be peace on earth

Jesus can you take time to throw a drowning man a line
Peace on Earth
To tell the ones who hear no sound, whose sons are living in the ground
Peace on Earth
Jesus sing a song you wrote, the words are sticking in my throat
Peace on Earth
Hear it every Christmas time, but hope and history won’t rhyme
So what’s it worth, this peace on Earth⁷

With no sense of hope, he drones on, Peace on Earth, Peace on Earth, Peace on Earth.

Contrast that to what Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote as the Civil War was coming close to an end. Apart from the bloodshed of a civil war, tragedy struck the home of Longfellow. During the year the war began, some hot wax fell onto his wife's dress and quickly engulfed her in flames. Frantically he tried to put the fire out, but the next day she passed from the wounds. The first Christmas after her passing he wrote, "How inexpressibly sad are the holidays." A year later he added, "I can make no record of these days. Better leave them wrapped in silence." It was a year later that Longfellow received word that his oldest son was badly injured in the war.⁸ It was on Christmas Day of 1864, that Longfellow penned the words we now sing:

I heard the bells on Christmas day,
Their old familiar carols play
And mild and sweet their songs repeat
Of peace on earth good will to men

And in despair I bowed my head
There is no peace on earth I said
For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth good will to men

But then you can hear Longfellow model for us what it means when David writes, "*To you, O LORD I lift up my soul.*" For the tone of the song changes and in his real pain, he expresses the trust that is born from a heart that hopes and waits on God.

Then rang the bells more loud and deep
God is not dead, nor does he sleep
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail
With peace on earth, good will to men⁹

This is what it means to turn to God in your pain and continue to trust him. Advent tells us that God's will and God's promise will be done. And so we "eagerly wait" by trusting the good will of God. We don't often understand why things happen. But we know we can trust God because God is using our pain for our future glory.

This past week I received news of friends of our who were in our church in Philadelphia. He was a seminary student at the time and is now a pastor in Maryland. They have three children ranging from late elementary school to high school. He had the misfortune this week of burying his wife after a long battle with breast cancer. His expertise is the Old

Testament, and like the psalms he is not reticent to be honest about his pain. I admire that about him. He posted on Facebook this week, “Been trying to figure out what to say that will both admit weakness and encourage hope. I guess that is kind of what the good news is.” The good news of Jesus is found in admitting our weakness and turning in trust to God who is our hope. This is how we wait during this Advent season, we continue to turn to God and affirm our trust in God. *“To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust.”*

There is one more thing I want to point out about what it looks like to trust God as part of a “waiting community.” Notice how the prayer turns in verse 4, *“Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.”* What we find here about what it means to be “a waiting community” is that “waiting” or “trusting in God” is not some passive approach to God. We don’t take our hands off of the wheel of our faith, as if waiting applies that there is nothing for us to do. Rather, it is an active pursuing of God and confidently living out your faith even when times are hard or when God even seems to be somewhat clouded from your sight.

These verses are somewhat reminiscent of Psalm 1. Here we are told that the man who is blessed is the one who lives his life according to the ways of God. Psalm 1 forms the introduction to the entire book of psalms and it affirms that the way of God is the source of well-being in life. And so when things on the surface of life don’t seem to be going well, as a waiting community of faith, we keep pursuing God because the promise to the faithful in the end is *“Blessed is the man.”* And so we pray that God would continue to “lead us in truth and teach us his ways” as we continue to “wait all the day long on God” and follow him in faith. Because of the hope of Advent, our faith does not waiver and in God we continue to trust.

Humble Yourself

There is a second thing we need to keep in mind as we learn what it means to be a “waiting community” this Advent Season. To “wait” means that we humble ourselves before God. That is a constant posture of a “waiting community.”

Something that struck me about this psalm of lament, Psalm 25, is the cause for lament. Often psalms of lament are lamenting the injustices that are committed against the psalmist or some kind of hardship that comes from their enemies and from outside of them. There is some of that in this psalm. We read of *“enemies”* in verse 2 and in verse

19 we read, *“Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me.”* But in this lament, I find that most of the lament comes from the sin and the evil that lives inside. There is a very strong confessional aspect to this lament. In verse 6-7 we read, *“Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!”* Again, there is a request in verse 18 that God would *“forgive all my sins.”*

When we hear this plea for “*mercy*” we are reminded that “*mercy*” is God withholding from us what we deserve. We don’t deserve all the blessings God has given us. Did you catch the jolting and sobering words of our Advent confession this morning? “Living God, I confess the slant of my heart to hate you and my neighbor. But that sounds so harsh—I’m not that bad, am I God? Yet if I am brutally honest, I see I am in deeper than I dare admit, unless I am born again by your Spirit. Fill me with greater hope this Advent season that in Christ’s love I am on my way to new life.”¹⁰ When you come with humble confession before God, you are more amazed that God would be so good to you.

Do you remember when Job wanted to have it out with God because he thought God was being unjust in his dealings with Job and he wanted God to answer for himself. And so God shows up and Job gets a picture of the absolute glory and wonder of God, and at the end Job is humbled and he says to God, *“I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see you; therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”*

See this is the joy of Advent that enables us to sing with joy even in our mess. In Jesus Christ, God has been merciful to us and our sins have been forgiven and we have come to know the living God. It does not deny the pain and challenge of some of the issues we have to deal with in our journey. But our comfort is “that we are not our own but we belong body and soul, in life and in death to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has paid for all our sin with his precious blood and has set us free from the tyranny of the devil. He watches over us in such a way that not one hair can fall from our heads without the will of our Father in heaven, in fact all things must work together for our salvation.”¹¹ Indeed God has been merciful to us and this is our joy as we wait.

And so we are assured in verse 9, *“He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.”* Here is what this psalm does as it points us to Advent. It enables us to pray with confidence, that despite our human failures and the suffering we can’t explain, we know that we worship a God who turns sorrow into joy. That is where humble confession leads us. So our cry of lament leads to grateful hope and trusting praise.

Rest in God's Love

This leads us to a final thought of how to “eagerly wait” and how this Advent Season provides us with hope for difficult days. Our hope is anchored in the love of God and so we need to rest in God's love. Three times we read in this psalm of the “*steadfast love*” of God. That is the translation of a very important word in Hebrew. It is the word *hesed*. This is a word that refers to a “covenantal love.” It tells us that God has made commitment to his people and that he will be faithful. This is why it says in verse 7, “*Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD.*” This appeal for God to release us from our sins is “*according to his steadfast love.*” In other words, he has made promise and he will keep it.

As a “waiting community” that still tastes and experiences suffering in this world, we wait by confidently resting in the “*steadfast love*” of God. God promised Abraham, all the way back in Genesis 12, that he would bless the world through Abraham's offspring. God promised David, that there would be a descendant of David's who would sit on the throne of Israel forever and that he would rule over God's kingdom “*with justice and righteousness.*” After reading that portion from Psalm 25 this morning, we read the great promise from Jeremiah 33, “*The days are coming,*’ declares the LORD, ‘*when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. In those days and at that time, I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days, Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called, The Lord Our Righteous Savior.*” The coming and the birth of Jesus is the result of the *steadfast love* of God. He made promise. The death of Jesus on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins is the result of the *steadfast love* of God. He made promise.

If we repent of our sins and turn to him by faith, our sins will be forgiven and nothing will separate us from God. How do I know? It is because of God's *steadfast love*. He is faithful. He made promise. It says in Psalm 36:5, “*Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.*” This is the source of our confidence and song as we eagerly wait with hope. We rest in God's love for us. It is a simple message. But it is a message we never tire of hearing. God loves you.

This is the beauty of Advent Season. Don't turn Christmas into a one day event and rob yourself of the strength that can come for the journey ahead. The purpose of this entire month is to remind ourselves that the promise that was fulfilled two thousand years ago

in the coming of Jesus to this world, assures us that this same Jesus will come again. This is a season of rejoicing because we believe that Jesus's first advent is the guarantee of his final appearance, his second advent. Therefore, in our times of lamenting and difficulty, we do not lose faith or hope, but rather, with joy and anticipation we "eagerly wait." We "wait" because as Paul says, "*we are sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" How can Paul be so sure? It is because he knows his of the *steadfast love* of God.

Conclusion

I am not sure where this Advent season finds you this morning. I am sure there is ample cause for the cry of "lament" here this morning. I am not suggesting that we suppress the cry of lament. But what I am suggesting, that even with the cry of lament, there can be the song of rejoicing. It is not fake rejoicing. It is not a trumped up rejoicing. It is a real rejoicing heard among the faithfully "waiting community."

So how do we wait? We trust God and demonstrate that trust by turning to God in our time of need and continuing to walk in our faith. We also humble ourselves and confess our weakness and trust in God. In doing so, we begin to see the goodness of God. And finally, we rest in the *steadfast love* of God. Nothing could be more sure than God's love for us. That is the message of Advent. In the sending of Jesus we hear the message from God loud and clear, there is no doubt that God loves us. This is the source of our confident joy!

¹http://www.faithaliveresources.org/promotions/sgf_advent_sampler.pdf

²Tim Keller *The Songs of Jesus* (New York: Viking Press, 2015)

³Keller

⁴Patricia Datchuck Sanchez “Psalms of Advent: Songs and Shouts of Joy . . . For the Interim” in *Pastoral Music*—August-September 1997 p. 52

⁵Editor’s note for Psalm 25:5 in The New Living Translation Study Bible

⁶Bono—quote found <http://www.atu2.com/lyrics/songinfo.src?SID=311>

⁷Bono , song, Peace on Earth, <http://www.atu2.com/lyrics/songinfo.src?SID=311>

⁸Tom Stewart “The Story Behind, I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” Dec. 20, 2001 http://www.whatsaiththescriture.com/Fellowship/Edit_I.Heard.the.Bells.html

⁹Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1864

¹⁰http://www.faithaliveresources.org/promotions/sgf_advent_sampler.pdf pg. 25

¹¹Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 1