

St John United Church of Christ
Rev. Barbara Lohrbach
June 20, 2010

Psalm 42 “You Put a Smile on My Face”

The Psalms are the songs of real people of an ancient time and place. The texts remind me of some of the country music I grew up hearing at home. They are earthy and filled with the reality of life. I appreciate the way Eugene Peterson translates the Psalms in the Message version. Each Sunday there is a Psalm, an ancient song, in the Lectionary lessons. Today is Psalm 42.

*A white-tailed deer drinks from the creek;
I want to drink God, deep draughts of God.
I'm thirsty for God-alive.
I wonder, "Will I ever make it—arrive and drink in God's presence?"
I'm on a diet of tears—tears for breakfast, tears for supper.
All day long people knock at my door,
Pestering, "Where is this God of yours?"*

*These are the things I go over and over, emptying out the pockets of my life.
I was always at the head of the worshiping crowd, right out in front,
Leading them all, eager to arrive and worship,
Shouting praises, singing thanksgiving—celebrating, all of us, God's feast!*

*Why are you down in the dumps, dear soul?
Why are you crying the blues?
Fix my eyes on God—soon I'll be praising again.
You put a smile on my face. You are my God.*

***When my soul is in the dumps, I rehearse everything I know of you,
From Jordan depths to Hermon heights, including Mount Mizar.
Chaos calls to chaos, to the tune of whitewater rapids.
Your breaking surf, your thundering breakers crash and crush me.
Then You promise to love me all day, sing songs all through the night!
My life is God's prayer.***

*Sometimes I ask God, my rock-solid God, "Why did you let me down?
Why am I walking around in tears, harassed by enemies?"
They're out for the kill, these tormentors with their obscenities,
Taunting day after day, "Where is this God of yours?"*

*Why are you down in the dumps, dear soul?
Why are you crying the blues?
Fix my eyes on God—soon I'll be praising again.
You put a smile on my face.
You are my God.*

Wow! Why are you down in the dumps dear soul? Why are you crying the blues? Reminds me of being with Ken Medema in concert and hear him telling about his days in high school. He

St John United Church of Christ
Rev. Barbara Lohrbach
June 20, 2010

says, “Why is everybody always picking on me?” and then asks the crowd, “Doesn’t it just feel good to say it aloud?” Try it. “Why is everybody always picking on me?”

There is a lesson in this psalm for us. First, the writer doesn’t just put on a happy face. He doesn’t deny how he feels. Why are you crying the blues? But this writer also tells us how to go on. “When my soul is in the dumps, I rehearse everything I know of you—everything I know of God. Then You promise to love me all day, sing songs all through the night. My life is God’s prayer.” God isn’t just some idea or cerebral thought to the writer—God is real. God is a companion. God is deeply involved. My life is God’s prayer.

I don’t know about you, but being this real about how I’m feeling is not easy. After all, I’m supposed to have it all together. At least that’s the impression the world has left on me. Be cool—don’t look or act like you are on some reality show. Never show your emotions. Hold it together, even when you want to cry the blues.

It’s been 3 weeks since I last was with you in worship. I was supposed to be gone 2 Sundays for vacation, but it ended up being 3. Most of you know the reason—my uncle died May 28 and the services were over the Memorial Day weekend. What you may not know is that during that same week, my mom was in the hospital and going through a heart procedure. She’s been dealing with heart issues since last December. If I were to be honest, the time I was away didn’t feel much like vacation. But then that little voice in my head, says, “Hold it together, don’t be honest about how you feel.”

The psalms don’t teach us to hide—they teach us to be honest, to risk opening up, to be vulnerable, to be human.

Losing my uncle Wayne has been hard. I was close to Wayne and my aunt Betty. I lived with them one summer out of high school and grew up with Betty. Betty and Wayne are the same age as Dean. One year ago, Dean’s friend and business partner, Bob Westover, died. He was also the same age as Dean. My uncle Wayne had been dealing with colon cancer for two years and things were not good. What you may not know is that the first week of my vacation was to be a trip to Kentucky to see him and my aunt Betty. He had been in the hospital for dehydration from chemo and was actually ready to go home, sitting up, dressed and ready, when he suddenly couldn’t breathe. He had thrown a blood clot and it went to his lungs. In 24 hours my 66-year old uncle was gone. The morning he died, my mom was having a 4 hour heart procedure which kept her in the hospital for 5 days. She didn’t get to go to the services.

My aunt Betty asked if I would give the eulogy for Wayne and if I thought I could sing. I told her it would be an honor and that I would do my best. Driving home from Springfield where my mom was in the hospital, I struggled with how I was going to handle all this. “When my soul is in the dumps, I rehearse everything I know of you.” The psalms were my help. I began to rehearse everything I knew of Wayne. I began to think of the songs I could sing and what comfort they might not only offer to my family, but to me.

The eulogy was my way to honor and remember Wayne. As I drove those 3 hours home, I thought of all the times we spent together and the still voice of God said, “Look how much you learned from Wayne.” That’s what I gave thanks for.

St John United Church of Christ
Rev. Barbara Lohrbach
June 20, 2010

I also thought of all of you, my church family, who I knew would understand why I needed to be gone for another Sunday. Friday afternoon is not easy to find someone to fill in but I knew that you all would understand and be gracious to whomever showed up to lead worship. I rehearsed everything I knew of you and left for Kentucky with the assurance, not only of God's love, God's song all through the night and God's prayer, but yours as well.

I want to say thank you today for your prayers, your cards, your emails, all the ways that you supported me and my family. I also want to share one thing I learned from my uncle Wayne. In the last week of his life, he taught me the importance of not waiting to tell someone you love them, to make that trip to see them because you never know when that opportunity will be gone.

And in an ancient time and a place, a songwriter left us with another lesson:

Why are you down in the dumps, dear soul?

Why are you crying the blues?

Fix my eyes on God—soon I'll be praising again.

You put a smile on my face. You are my God.

When my soul is in the dumps, I rehearse everything I know of you,

Then You promise to love me all day, sing songs all through the night!

My life is God's prayer.

Father's Day, contrary to popular misconception, was not established as a holiday in order to help greeting card manufacturers sell more cards. In fact, when a "father's day" was first proposed, there were no Father's Day cards!

Mrs. John B. Dodd, of Washington, first proposed the idea of a "father's day" in 1909. Mrs. Dodd wanted a special day to honor her father, William Smart. William Smart, a Civil War veteran, was widowed when his wife (Mrs. Dodd's mother) died in childbirth with their sixth child. Mr. Smart was left to raise the newborn and his other five children by himself on a rural farm in eastern Washington state. It was after Mrs. Dodd became an adult that she realized the strength and selflessness her father had shown in raising his children as a single parent.

The first Father's Day was observed on June 19, 1910, in Spokane, Washington. At about the same time in various towns and cities across America, other people were beginning to celebrate a "father's day." In 1924 President Calvin Coolidge supported the idea of a national Father's Day. Finally in 1966 President Lyndon Johnson signed a presidential proclamation declaring the third Sunday of June as Father's Day

Father's Day has become a day to not only honor your father, but all men who act as a father figure. Stepfathers, uncles, grandfathers and adult male friends are all to be honored on Father's Day.

- "The Story of Father's Day," www.holidays.net/father/story.htm.