

## Heartbreak and Hope Psalm 31:9–16

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ, amen.

Heartbreak is part of life. All you have to do is google "heartbreak songs." You'll see lists of 20, 30, 77, 100 all-time best heartbreak or breakup tunes. Would there be a Taylor Swift without breakup songs? Recording artists celebrate heartbreak. But when heartbreak hits you, you're not celebrating.

I was certainly not celebrating when I learned of Pastor Breum's resignation a few weeks back. It hit me hard. It was a blow to us all. Life goes on. But we still feel the ache. St. Mark will be regrouping for a long time.

Hope is also part of life. There are songs about hope too. For that matter hope is a big part of athletics. Recently something called March Madness swept our country, as it does every spring in the form of the NCAA basketball tournament. We saw many examples of upsets. Upsets happen when 16 or 15 seeds don't lose hope. Hope is contagious. Hope creates energy. Hopeful people find strength and skill they didn't know they had. In many cases, hope wins over long odds.

Our Psalm reading creates space for us to bring our heartbreak to the LORD this morning. It also points us to the hope shown by and found in Christ Jesus. Let us pray.

Lord, we all carry heartbreak. Recent events have rocked us. Old memories haunt us. Things you have forgiven we still bear the scars of. We confess to you our sorrows, our hurts. (Pause) We look to you for hope. Speak to us, touch our hearts, by your word and Spirit and even the communion elements that we will share. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Our Psalm reading consists of eight verses. Five of them express heartbreak. David wrote this Psalm. But it is recognized as a Christological psalm. That means we can read it, yes, as King David's prayer, for it is a prayer to the LORD, from a thousand years before Christ. But it also expresses the heart of a descendent of David, our Lord Jesus.

The Psalms were the hymnal of the Jewish synagogue Jesus attended weekly all his life. Psalms were sung in the home and in Jerusalem at the temple. Jesus knew this Psalm. God the Father used it in the life of God the Son as Jesus dealt with heartbreak just like we do.

Let us look briefly at Jesus' heartbreak and then ours. Then we'll consider hope. I'll be making three points this morning.

### **1. Jesus knew heartbreak.**

V. 9 speaks of Jesus' distress and grief.

Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress;  
my eye is wasted from grief;  
my soul and my body also.

Jesus wept at Lazarus' tomb. He wept over Jerusalem. Isaiah was right: the Messiah would be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Jesus felt distress body and soul and showed it.

Recently longtime St. Mark member Betty Pischke was laid to rest. She was our neighbor for the 14 years we lived in Venetian Village. So was her husband Norb, and their neighbors Axel and Arline Swanson, all now with the Lord. We grieve and mourn their loss.

Jesus was no stranger to sorrow. V. 10 speaks of it.

For my life is spent with sorrow,  
and my years with sighing;  
my strength fails because of my iniquity,  
and my bones waste away.

Scholars find echoes of v. 10 in a verse from John's Gospel, when Jesus states during what we call Holy Week, "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour" (12:27).

We glimpse Jesus' sorrow also in this verse from Matthew's Gospel: "And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled" (Matt. 26:37). Jesus broke out in a visible sweat praying in Gethsemane.

Luke's Gospel says the sweat was like drops of blood. Not just sweat but Jesus' actual blood would flow soon enough.

V. 11 describes the contempt that many had for Jesus. Even his own family distanced themselves from him.

Because of all my adversaries I have become a reproach,  
especially to my neighbors,  
and an object of dread to my acquaintances;  
those who see me in the street flee from me.

V. 12 voices despair. Jesus was the promised Messiah, the king and the savior of his people and of the world. But his fellow Jews seem to have forgotten what their own Scriptures foretold about the Messiah. Jesus felt like a broken vessel.

I have been forgotten like one who is dead;  
I have become like a broken vessel.

Recently we had a family emergency. I caused it. I bumped the carafe of our coffeemaker against the granite countertop. The carafe broke. I couldn't make coffee at 4 AM when I desperately needed it. I almost called 911. There's only one thing to do with a broken glass carafe: pitch it. It's useless.

Useless was how the influencers of the Jewish nation viewed Jesus. He did not meet the expectations of people who wanted a glam savior, a political ruler who would kick out the Romans. That's what they were calling for on Palm Sunday. Jesus mocked their acclaim by riding not a warhorse but a lowly donkey. Later in the week the vessel of his body would be broken outside the city walls on a hill called The Place of a Skull, Golgotha.

V. 13 describes the buzz Jesus endured for the whole three years of his public ministry. Notice the words whispering, terror, scheme, plot. Jesus was not delusional. He had a traitor in his own ranks who finally did him in.

For I hear the whispering of many—  
terror on every side!—  
as they scheme together against me,  
as they plot to take my life.

An important note from back in v. 10. We read: "my strength fails because of my iniquity." This was true of King David. His sins are writ large in Scripture. In contrast, Jesus knew no sin. But he assumed the sin of Israel when he received baptism from John, because John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. Jesus' identified with Israel and with all mankind in bearing with human sin all his life. Eventually he actually took on our sin when the Father placed it on him on the cross.

In sum, and with great understatement, I conclude: Jesus knew heartbreak.

## **2. Our heartbreak is not terminal because the Father fortifies those who look to him in faith.**

Actually our Creator builds resilience into people. All people suffer heartbreak, and most people deal with it enough to keep going. But it takes its toll.

Heartbreak is especially hard when it is relational. In marriage there can be hard feelings, harsh words, even abuse. If the marriage ends, looking back there are always feelings of guilt and shame.

Jesus was accused and shamed even though he was innocent. How did he handle the heartbreak of rejection and eventually betrayal? If we believe in Christ, these words from our Philippians reading apply: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus" (2:9). What does that mean?

It means that when we trust Christ and follow him, we develop a capacity to see things his way not ours. By faith, his life increasingly affects our life, as Galatians 2:20 states: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Christ lives in believers. His life intertwines with our life, permeates our life, elevates our life, purifies our life, guides our life, protects our life. I recall a hymn with these words: Because he lives I can face tomorrow. I can, and you can, because Christ lives in and among us.

In fellowship with Jesus we grow in prayer. In fellowship with Jesus we grow in communion with God who can heal wounded hearts. In fellowship with Jesus we learn to spot and get rid of our sin, which often brings heartache. In fellowship with Jesus, we work together, revel in the work, and revel in the Lord, together.

In fellowship with Jesus, we confess our heartbreak to God and move on with our life and our duties, just as Jesus endured disappointment constantly but never gave up on his mission.

God can take our heartbreak and, in the strength of Jesus Christ who lives in us and through us, leverage it into what the Bible calls godly sorrow that leads to life. This doesn't mean that the pain of heartbreak either feels good or is good.

Yet heartbreak hits us all. And Christ the Lord of life fills us with what we need to bear our sadness, weather it, and continue to glorify God as we move forward.

### **3. Jesus modeled hope.**

Maybe none of us has ever lived where authorities were continually trying to kill us. Jesus lived that way during much of his three-year public ministry. And at the end of that time, he would die for the very people who made his life difficult.

How did he do it? Why did he do it? Three words: A. trust, B. conviction, C. need.

A. We see trust in v. 14: But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God."

Why is that word LORD in capital letters? It's because that's the sacred name for God given to Moses at the burning bush. That word O expresses emotion. This language conveys something heartfelt. It expresses commitment. It expresses what King David and Jesus the Messiah excelled in: trust in God.

We live in a time of widespread mistrust. I'm not saying everything is bad. But in lots of places it seems that government is corrupt. The economy is shaky. Religious freedom and freedom of speech are under pressure. It's harder and harder to trust public institutions.

Down near St. Louis where I live, in a town called Troy, a grandson killed his two grandparents a couple of weeks back. Often in the news we hear of parents harming their children. No wonder anxiety and depression and dependencies are rampant. It's harder and harder to know who to trust.

And sometimes we are the ones who others can't trust. When someone has let you down, remember: you've probably let a few people down too.

In these sketchy times, v. 14 says, "Trust God." Say with David and Jesus, "You are my God." Say it with daily Bible reading where you hear about God and commune with him. Say it with prayers at mealtimes and when you get up and when you lie down at night and through the day as needed. Say it with obedience to God's commands. Say you trust God by resisting temptations to sin against God. Say it in communion and when you leave this service today. Trust God.

*God becomes real when we treat him as real.* I think of this stanza of an old hymn:

Every joy or trial falleth from above,  
Traced upon our dial by the Sun of Love;  
We may **trust** Him fully all for us to do;  
They who **trust** Him wholly find Him wholly true.

Jesus modeled hope by A. trust and

B. conviction. In v. 15 we read, "My times are in your hands." Jesus knew God had a purpose for him. He has a purpose for all who have trusted Christ. What is your purpose? It's great to be in church, but what about the other 167 hours of the week? Are you engaged in a life that fulfills God's will for you? Do you know that will? Are you pursuing it?

Jesus said (John 8:29): "He who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him." Jesus lived by the conviction that his times, his months and days and minutes, were in God's hands. Therefore he made it his aim to seek and do the Father's will.

That is a conviction that we are all growing into. God's will for each of us unfolds as we walk with him, learn from him, get corrected by him, confess to him, serve him, rejoice in him, hope in him.

That's what we see Jesus doing as Holy Week began. Though he knew it would be his last week, he was sustained by the conviction, "My times are in your hand." As long as we hold on to that conviction, we have hope. In fact even when we lose our grip on that conviction, when we get confused or lethargic or knocked down by heartbreak, God still reigns. Don't give up on God! If you have made Christ your LORD, he is not giving up on you!

Jesus modeled hope by A. trust, B. conviction, and

C. need. Notice the three pleas in vv. 15 and 16:

- rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors!
- Make your face shine on your servant;
- save me in your steadfast love!

The Bible says we have not because we ask not. Jesus had hope because in his trust and conviction he had the humility and wisdom to voice his need.

When you feel hopeless, tell God. Life plays rough. We face forces stronger than we are. Sometimes we undercut ourselves. We need rescue. We need God's face to shine on us. We need him to save us in his steadfast love.

Psalm 31 says these things for our sakes on this Palm Sunday 2023, two weeks following the resignation of our pastor of 22 years. We've had heartache. Jesus knows what a punch to the gut feels like. We need hope. Jesus gives hope, *Jesus is our hope*, in abundance. I close with these words from Jesus:

Luke 11:9 And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

Amen and amen.