

From Rev. Angela Freeman-Riley, Pastor, Bethesda on the Bay Lutheran Church

*As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God? ... 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. Psalm 42:1-2, 5-6a (NRSV)*

Abraham Lincoln is quoted as confessing, “I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go.” It’s not exactly an ideal model of faithfulness, but it’s a pretty realistic one. The truth is that most of us tend to remember and turn to God when we need help, but pay much less attention when things are going well.

Many folks have been having a hard time finding hope these days. We’re used to being able to “look on the bright side” or at least “find the silver lining”. What do we do when those approaches aren’t working? When no matter what we try to tell ourselves, our souls remain cast down and disquieted within us? When we are, in the words of Jesus’ Beatitudes, “hungering and thirsting for righteousness” but finding no comfort?

The testimony of the psalms is a fruitful place to turn, for they will point us in the right direction. Our hope is in God. Nothing else will sustain us when the rivers of justice and righteousness have run dry. God, who makes streams in the desert. God, who protects the widows and the orphans. God, who took on flesh and walked beside us in human form, experiencing the fullness of pain and joy that is mortal life.

Others may scoff when we turn to God for hope, saying we’re just trying to make ourselves feel better. We ourselves may struggle to find the peace that comes from hoping in God because our disappointment with our current situation is so deep. But the discipline of hope is worth practicing over and over till we’ve got it down. We may not be able to explain it. We may not always be able to feel it. But when we declare that our hope is in God, we pray that hope into existence.

Let us pray: *God of Comfort, who holds all those who are suffering and fearful, grant that our hope might be renewed, that we might again praise you. Through Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit, Amen.*