Reflection for 27 June 2021—Hope in the Lord!

2 Samuel 1: 1, 17-19, 23-27 David weeps for his friends
Psalm 130 Out of the depths, we cry to God

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When I was choosing among the various texts designated for this Sunday, I was in shock, having just learned of Stan Burnip's unexpected death. The story of the young warrior David lamenting the death of his king and his closest friend, Prince Jonathan, just tore my heart.

As a congregation in the Affirming process, learning how to become and be an Affirming Community, it is worth noting that this passage is read by the LGBTQ+ community as an indication that David and Jonathan shared more than filial love. David writes, "[26]I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women."

And the Psalm for this week, though not explicitly attributed to David, was likely also written by David, and begins in lament. "Out of the depths, I cry to you, O Lord."

It is one of fifteen of the Psalms, numbers 120-134, designated as Songs of Ascent, so called because pilgrims heading up to the holy city of Jerusalem for one of the three annual pilgrim festivals[i] would be singing as they ascended. And this is one such prayer that they might sing.

There are other theories about them, too. Some scholars "think they were sung by the Levite singers as they ascended the fifteen steps to minister at the Temple in Jerusalem. One view says the Levites first sang the Songs at the dedication of Solomon's temple. Another suggests that they were composed for a celebration after Nehemiah's rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls in 445 BC. Others consider that they may originally have been individual poems which were later collected together and given the title linking them to pilgrimage after the Babylonian captivity."[ii]

They were kind of like the "Praise Songs" of their day … poetic, short, repetitive. Easton's Bible Dictionary reports that "more than half of them are cheerful, and all of them hopeful."[iii] That is what drew me into Psalm 130, that—though it begins in "the depths" (sounding quite devastated)—it becomes hopeful, reassured by God's forgiveness.

The middle part of the Psalm speaks of waiting for God in hope, which epitomizes what we are doing as a community of faith in transition. In fact, for the month of June, a small group of us gathered weekly on Tuesday mornings to do just that. We prayed silently, waiting and listening for God's guidance for EPUC's future directions. At the end of each session, we shared what had come to us in the silent praying.

Some of what emerged felt quite profound. We heard:

> "I am everlasting. Do not fear the future."
>
> How might we be a sanctuary, not just a hub?
>
> Pastoral care and outreach were reinforced.
>
> We have deep roots historically and spiritually; spend time nurturing the spiritual to root us for the pastoral care and outreach.
>
> We are connected to the Creator.
>
> Follow boldly.

Psalm 130 ends:

7 O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with God is great power to redeem.
8 It is God who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

When I read that, I also heard:

East Plains, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with God is great power to redeem.
It is God who will redeem ***East Plains*** ….

And I heard:

O Canada, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with God is great power to redeem.
It is God who will redeem ***Canada*** from all its iniquities.

In this week in which we celebrate Canada Day, that was something hopeful to hold onto in a time of recognizing the "iniquities" of our colonial past, including the Residential Schools and the impact they had on First Nations peoples.

Many people whose hearts have been broken by the discovery of thousands of children[iv] buried on residential school grounds are choosing not to observe Canada Day in the usual patriotic ways this year. Some are wearing orange[v] shirts, rather than red, to remember the lost children and their suffering, as well as that of their families and communities.

Symbols and actions are important for those of us who are doers. But sometimes we jump to action too impulsively. It is part of the Western *modus operandi*. Some are offering wise words for these times, counseling time for lament and reflection first.

United Church Moderator, Richard Bott, wrote this week, "I knew that I would be asked to make statements, and let people know what The United Church of

Canada is doing in response to what may be found on or near the properties of the former residential schools that the United Church operated. I want you to know that we are actively working on that, following the principles of right relationship identified by United Church residential school Survivors, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. Information about specifics will be shared in the coming days and weeks."

He also mentions a hymn that he remembers his mother singing, "Oh come and mourn with me awhile," a song about taking time to gather with others and grieve a terrible loss. He suggests that doing that would help us "remember who this time is really about—the children whose bodies are in the unmarked graves, and the grief of every Indigenous person across this land, because every Indigenous community, every Indigenous person has been changed by the legacy of Canada's residential schools." He goes on:

> I have been given to understand that the peoples of the Cowessess have a tradition of four days of ceremony for mourning. As I post this, it is the evening of the second day. Chief Delorme asked Canada to "stand by us as we heal and we get stronger."
>
> There is going to come a time, very soon—a time that will need careful listening, careful action, and careful walking together with all of the Indigenous communities and peoples of this land. I believe this will be a time that will call for challenge and for change, person-to-person, community-to-community, nation-to-nation. We need to be together in a good way in this journey.
>
> I believe that part of being together in a good way, right now, is to stop—to stand by the Cowessess community, and all Indigenous communities, in their mourning and prayer. To quietly mourn and pray, whoever we are, wherever we are.[vi]

Psalm 130 invites us to do that. As a community in mourning for our beloved brother Stan, as a faith community in transition listening for God's guidance for this church, as Christians recovering from racism and homophobia, as Canadians regretting a history that we didn't learn in school and are now owning as part of our colonial imperialistic heritage (if we have settler ancestry), let us take time to grieve and wait for God in hope.

"Hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with God is great power to redeem." (Ps 130:7)

Endnotes

[i] Sukkot, Pesach and Shavuot are the three festivals for which pilgrims would travel to Jerusalem to celebrate. **Sukkot** commemorates the years that the Jews spent in the desert on their way to the Promised Land, and **celebrates** the way in which God protected them under difficult desert conditions. **Sukkot** is also known as the Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Booths. **Pesach** is the Passover celebration. **Shavuot is** a major Jewish festival held fifty days after the second day of Passover. It was originally a harvest festival, but now also commemorates the giving of the Law (the Torah). The Christian Pentecost event likely happened during Shavuot, 50 days after Easter.

[ii] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Song_of_Ascents#cite_note-3, accessed on 26 June 2021.

[iii] Ibid.

[iv] At this time, the following discoveries have been made: The unmarked graves of more than 751 people have been discovered at the site of the former Marieval Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan, after 215 graves were found in Kamloops and hundreds of remains were found in other provinces in the past month.

[v] The orange shirt symbol is based on Phyllis Jack Webstad's story of an orange shirt lost long ago. When she was six years old, her grandmother gifted her an orange shirt for her first day of school. But her first day at residential school didn't go as either of them expected. Phyllis's clothes were taken away from her, including the orange shirt. The orange shirt was never returned to her, but the colour orange always made Phyllis think of her experiences at a residential school."The colour orange has always reminded me of that and how my feelings didn't matter, how no one cared and how I felt like I was worth nothing." https://www.techlifetoday.ca/articles/2020/why-we-wear-orange-on-orange-shirt-day-nait, accessed on 27 June 2021.

[vi] https://www.facebook.com/ModeratorRichardBott