Sermon – CCRC, August 3, 2025 – "Recorded Tears"

Prayer for illumination: As we open your Word, O Lord, calm us into a quietness that heals and listens. Open wounded hearts to the balm of your Word. Speak to us in clear tones so that we might feel our spirits leap for joy and skip with hope. In Jesus Name we pray. Amen.

David at Gath I Samuel 21:10-15

10 That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath. 11 But the servants of Achish said to him, "Isn't this David, the king of the land? Isn't he the one they sing about in their dances:

"'Saul has slain his thousands,
and David his tens of thousands'?"

12 David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish king of Gath. 13 So he pretended to be insane in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard.

14 Achish said to his servants, "Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me? 15 Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me? Must this man come into my house?"

Psalm 56

For the director of music. To the tune of "A Dove on Distant Oaks." Of David. A *miktam.* When the Philistines had seized him in Gath.

1 Be merciful to me, my God,
for my enemies are in hot pursuit;
all day long they press their attack.
2 My adversaries pursue me all day long;
in their pride many are attacking me.

3 When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.
4 In God, whose word I praise—
in God I trust and am not afraid.
What can mere mortals do to me?

5 All day long they twist my words;
all their schemes are for my ruin.
6 They conspire, they lurk,
they watch my steps,
hoping to take my life.
7 Because of their wickedness do not let them escape;
in your anger, God, bring the nations down.

8 Record my misery;
list my tears on your scroll—
are they not in your record?
9 Then my enemies will turn back
when I call for help.
By this I will know that God is for me.

10 In God, whose word I praise,
in the LORD, whose word I praise—
11 in God I trust and am not afraid.
What can man do to me?

12 I am under vows to you, my God;
I will present my thank offerings to you.
13 For you have delivered me from death
and my feet from stumbling,
that I may walk before God
in the light of life.

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Earlier this summer, my wife and I headed off on vacation to the east coast of Canada and more specifically Prince Edward Island. We have a 40-year history with the Island and so off we went to celebrate my wife's birthday and our anniversary with folks we have known and cherished for a long time. Then our children surprised us with their presence on the Island for the birthday. What a time we had! Time was spent enjoying the beauty of not only PEI but also Cape Breton. Oh, to travel and explore! It is summer after all and this is what often happens during the summer months. We use this time of the year, when regular schedules tend to take a back seat, to go camping or to travel to meet old friends or get together as families or go on picnics or whatever. July and August have always been sort of laid-back months in which we enjoy the wonders of creation and in which we relax with others. These are also the months when we perhaps take a break from politics and from the news. This Civic holiday long weekend is, as it were, the height of the summer!

But the problem is, and this is not meant as a downer, but the problem is, that no matter how much fun vacation or travel time may be and no matter how much we try to ignore the news, the realities of life do not take summer breaks and time off. We personally experienced this on the second day of our trip to the east. Arriving at our destination at the end of the day, we got the news that my niece's 8-year-old daughter died of cancer, with which she had been diagnosed but 3 months earlier. So, while we were enjoying a trip and very much looking forward to what was to come, a young family had to deal with deep unutterable grief. Besides, the death of the young grand-niece, we were also living with another serious health situation in the family involving cancer, which is still ongoing.

There we sat with the two realities, on the one hand excitement about the trip and on the other hand deep sorrow. What do we do? Should we go back home? Should we go on?

And this sort of thing happens all the time. Summer should be a time of camps and traveling and gathering and time off and excitement, not grief and pain and sadness and tears…. But grief and pain does not respect our time or our schedules. So, when the Geleynse family got together for a weekend earlier this summer and when we gathered for worship on the Sunday morning, we reflected on Psalm 56. Yes, we had a great time

catching up and socializing and thoroughly enjoying each other's company, but at the same time we were all too aware of the pain behind the scenes.

When you drive though the Maritimes or other beautiful parts of this country, the fields and streams and lakes, rivers and mountains can seem so peaceful, so idyllic. We stop and take pictures of beautiful scenery and say ooh and aah, all the while not giving much thought to the fact that what we are seeing is all part of a fallen world. Death, hatred, brokenness, war, destruction, refugees, mental illness, pollution, injustice, lack of respect, pornography, misogyny, abuse…the list is endless, are all found behind the idyllic scenes whether we happen to like that or not.

So, while we were on vacation and having a wonderful time a whole host of events were on the go, events that brought forth outrage, tears and deep grief for many people: 5 hockey players were in a London courtroom and their lurid activities in a hotel room were splashed all over the news – E.M. was the young woman who had to testify about events that were deeply degrading. The behaviour of folks like Jeffery Epstein and the implications in those affairs of the US President has been recounted and while their victims have gone nameless, nonetheless their lives have been greatly affected. The "Special Military Operation" has been ongoing in Ukraine and many lives have been lost and, oh boy…the gang violence in Haiti has been in the news; the horror of war in the Sudan and the Congo, and there continue to be millions of refugees fleeing for their lives from injustice, war and poverty. And then who can forget the absolute calamity and misery of Gaza? Oh, Lord have mercy!

It is summer! It is vacation time! It is time for fun and games, and I never want to discount the importance of all of that because it is really good to get away from it at times, but at the same time there are millions of people whose eyes are filled with tears and whose hearts are broken and heavy with grief.

Forest fires and wild fires have driven thousands from their homes and towns and territories and have impacted the air quality throughout the world. What a great amount of fear and pain have been expressed by those who had to flee! Tornados and hurricanes and floods and earthquakes and landslides and all sorts of "natural disasters" have caused death and destruction and great grief to many people. Tears are everywhere, it seems, and there is no end to the sorts of things that cause us to tear up or that cause

us grief.

At home here in our midst there are all sorts of tears too. Some of us continue to mourn the loss of a loved one. There are moments when we are overwhelmed by that and the tears flow. Some of us, who are older, sometimes have the feeling that all we are attending are funerals. Death is surely a producer of a great deal of tears, not only at the time of the loss, but sometimes even years later. When thinking about those who have gone before, it does not take much for the tears to come, because the empty spot can be so real and hurt so much even years after the loss.

Of course, there are **many** other reasons for tears. They are not only brought on by death. The apparent irreconcilable differences between members of this congregation leading to a divorce and a possible new congregation brings on the tears. Others sitting here by themselves because other family members don't want to come anymore hurt. Lost loves, a lost future, a lost child, a lost job, a lost home, a lost memory … are all tear-inducing. We have failed at something; we cannot seem to find a partner for life - such pains are very real too. We experience bullying or some other sort of abuse and don't know what to do with it. We weep! Perhaps you weep privately over what is happening to you in your own life, maybe some life-altering diagnosis, or whatever. Some of us may feel terribly alone with our pain, and of course, such loneliness only adds more tears to our lives. Life may seem very unfair to us. All sorts of things afflict us whereas others seem to be left alone and are able to sail through life relatively untouched. As we think about such inequities the tears may again easily flow. Does anyone care what happens to me? Does anyone really understand the sorts of things I struggle with in life? My depression, my private illness is not something I can share with others. Does anyone care? Oh, how I wish life was different than it is. Again, tears are easy to come by.

Now the question is what do we do with all these tears? Does anyone even care? Or are all the tears we weep wasted? Listen to what David wrote in Psalm 56:8, from the New Living Translation, and let it sink in:

"You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book." (Psalm 56:8 - New Living Translation)

Or as Eugene Peterson puts it in "The Message":

You've kept track of my every toss and turn
through the sleepless nights,
Each tear entered in your ledger,
each ache written in your book.

The good news is that God cares, and He even records or collects all of our tears, He saves them! Imagine that? So special, so wonderful is the God we serve!

One of the great and marvelous things about the Psalms, in the Bible, is that they are not primarily doctrinal pronouncements. But the Psalms speak from the heart. They are personal expressions of anguish, worry, love, joy, peace, trust, faith and such like things. If you think that you are the only one who has been scared, the psalms will tell you otherwise. If you think that you are only one who has been upset with the Lord because of something that happened in your life, the psalmist will tell you differently. If you think that you are the only one who has ever raised your fist toward heaven or felt that things happening in this world were totally unfair, open the Psalms and discover that there is nothing new under the sun. In the Psalms, it becomes clear that the Lord allows us to be fully human. The writers of the Psalms share the full range of human emotions. Psalm 56 is among those expressing strong emotion along with 64 other Psalms of Lament in the Book of 150 Psalms.

In the subtitle we read that this particular Psalm is credited to David. The occasion for this Psalm 56 would appear to be when the Philistines had seized David in Gath. Remember that there was a time when David had damaged the Philistine reputation when he, as a young shepherd boy had defeated Goliath. On that occasion David had made a laughing stock of the Philistines having defeated one of their mightiest warriors. As a result, David must have been tops on the Philistine most wanted list. David must have been a wanted man by the enemy. Now he is in Gath as recorded by I Samuel 21:1015 which was read earlier.

As Psalm 56 suggests is that David is not having a good time or an easy time of it in Gath and even before his ending up in Gath. *"Be merciful to me, O God, for men hotly pursue me; all day long they press their attack* (v.1)." The young shepherd boy, now famous, was a wanted man -- wanted

by everyone it seems. As the newly anointed king of Israel, David was a threat to Saul's throne, so Saul chased David all through the desert to try to capture him. David had to watch his every step. No place in Israel was safe for David.

How are you doing, David? David has no problem giving an answer, whether we want to hear it or not. He lets us know that he is not doing very well; he is tired, hungry, and afraid for his life. He is aware of the plots against him and his lack of safety. *"They conspire, they lurk, they watch my steps, eager to take my life* (v. 6)." Not only was Saul out to get him, but the Philistines wanted him too. They wanted revenge for what had been done to Goliath and the whole army at the time.

While being pursued and having to look over his shoulder all the time, David, in righteous anger, asked the Lord, in verse 7, to do something about the enemy. He prays that the Lord would bring down all those who stand opposed to him and to the Kingdom of heaven. The servant of the Lord can speak this way because he fully recognized the Lord as his father in heaven. This was a son asking his father for protection, and asking his father for justice on behalf of the child. When reading the Psalms you discover it so often that the Psalmist just lets the Lord know what he is thinking. There is an honest open relationship with the Lord, which sometimes makes us wonder if what is being said is even appropriate. But when one has a trusting relationship, such openness is possible and even encouraged by the Lord. David could talk to God as if God were his "daddy", "Abba, Father". This kind of relationship is possible in Christ Jesus and through the working of the Holy Spirit. Even though the Spirit had not as yet been poured out upon the church, nonetheless, David had the Spirit of the Lord working within him.

The intimate understanding of who God was in his life is made even clearer to us in verse 8 of Psalm 56. *"Record my lament; list my tears on your scroll--are they not in your record?"*

Or: *You've kept track of my every toss and turn*
through the sleepless nights,
Each tear entered in your ledger,
each ache written in your book.

David hereby expresses his belief, well founded, that each day of his wandering through the wilderness, each cave, and rocky nook, in which he

found shelter for the night or from the storm, each step that he has taken, every evasive action he has taken to escape his enemies, even his pretending he was insane in Gath, everything he did has been noted by the Lord. As a result, David did not feel in the least forsaken by the Lord. He expressed his trust in the Lord, his God, a God who was on his side, and therefore he had nothing to fear of others. "What can anyone do to me?" As the apostle Paul wrote: *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* David knows that the ultimate victory over the enemy will be his, because of the Lord the God of Israel, the God who was, even then, working out his plan of Salvation through the covenant he had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as well as David.

David speaks of such an intimate relationship with the Lord that he claims, as it were, *"that the Lord sits at his bedside and every time he turns in his bed the Lord makes a note of it."* From verse 8 we get a picture of a father sitting on the bedside of his troubled son, watching and guarding him and soothing him in his sleep and troubles. One can just see the Father sitting there with a notebook, keeping track of what some great hurt or distress has done to the child. The psalmist also asks the Lord to collect his tears in a bottle, or wine-flask, and record the amount. He asks the Lord to treasure his tears. Not one should fall to the ground and be lost. The child asked that each tear be recorded in the Book of the Lord. David did not want his suffering, his sleepless nights and endless tears to be of no importance or to be wasted. As far as he was concerned these, too, ought to have their place in life and in the plan of God, these also had to have a purpose.

The purpose of these records and collected tears, according to Psalm 56, is that when God sees the injustice, the pain, inflicted on one of his children, and when the Lord sees and reads the result of that pain in terms of the tossing and the number of tears collected in the bottle, or wineskin flask, then the Lord will respond and deliver his child, his servant. Job, in the midst of his misery, and with the knowledge that his suffering was not the direct result of some sin that he had committed, said *"Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, that they were inscribed with an iron tool or lead, or engraved in rock forever!"* (Job 19:23, 24) This is the same sort of thing said by David and for the same purpose. If Job should die from his misery and suffering, then at least future generations, and even more importantly the Lord would know that he was righteous, and that something should be done about the injustice and pain caused. The

request is that the Lord record the suffering so that it may be reviewed and that the Lord, the righteous God then do something about it to set it all straight.

Who cares how I am doing? 'God does', says the Psalmist. Are my tears wasted? No, *"God, my father in heaven, cares so much that He makes notes of my tossing and turnings, and even catches my tears in a bottle; He treasures them"*. One writer reflecting on this passage wrote the following: *"This sounds as silly as that expression in the Bible that not a hair can fall from my head without His sovereign will. Isn't that exaggerating things? In the first place who cares about the number of my hairs? Likewise, the tossing in my bed and the tears I shed are of little importance. I try not to pay attention to them and I try to hide them from loved ones."* Indeed, who cares about the tears we weep? Who really cares about all the things that cause us to cry? Who really cares whether or not life is unfair for us? Who really cares about the injustices of our society? Who cares?

Well, David would have us know, the Bible would have us know, the Lord cares. God is not some far off, removed-from-reality, Great Spirit in the sky. No, God, the God of the Bible cares about you and me and about what we think and feel. He cares so much as a matter of fact that he became like us in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus took on our flesh and blood and became like us in every way except that he did not sin. In fact, God cares that much that he gave up the glory of heaven and humbled himself in the likeness of man. And he has promised to be with us even to the close of the age. He may not necessarily change our disagreeable situation or condition, but he has promised to be with us and walk with us through it. We still may have to face struggles, persecution, financial difficulties, broken relationships, disabilities, accidents, illness, and even death, on this earth and in this life. But as believers we do not have to face these things alone. The Lord is right here with us recording our tossing and turning, collecting our tears. All the misery of the ages, your and my misery, is recorded in the heavenly books. It caused the Lord to act in the past; He sent His Son. It caused the Lord to set into motion the great plan of salvation, which will culminate with the coming again of Jesus. When Jesus comes again all the written down pain and all the collected tears will be answered in that all things will be made new. There will be a new heaven and a new earth where there will be no more tossing and turning in bed because of struggles in life, and there will be no more collections of tears because then there will be no more tears, only glory. The day will come when God's people will be

vindicated, when the books will be opened and responded to. What a day that will be!

In the meantime, we can learn from David's faith. The Lord whom we serve is our Father in heaven. He numbers the hairs on our head, he provides for us all things necessary for life, and he keeps a record of our tossing and turning and collects our tears and treasures them. He walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death, and he never leaves us. Oh, our situation may not change, we may go on tossing and turning and crying because of the misery of this life, but at the same time the Bible calls on us to trust in the Lord, the Lord of life. And trust in Him we can, after all He has been true to His word all along. Jesus' coming is a prime example of His being true to His word. *"Record my lament; list my tears on your scroll--are they not in your record?"* (Ps. 56:8) This is a rhetorical question, with the assumed answer that, of course, they are all recorded, after all God is our Father. Surely, in a tear-filled world, this is our comfort! Amen.

Prayer: Lord, we praise you for your Word which always speaks volumes of comfort to us, your children. Thank you that our tears, our pain, our suffering, our agony over injustice and over what befalls us in life, is all recorded by you. You care! We are so grateful! Continue to hold us in the palm of your hand, we pray. Be merciful to us and to this world, so wracked by injustice and pain. Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.