

“Speak your Pain – Claim your Promise”

*God! God, save me! I'm in over my head,
Quicksand under me, swamp water over me; I'm going down for the third time.
I'm hoarse from calling for help, bleary-eyed from searching the sky for God. [Psalm 69.1-3]*

How many of you have ever felt like this?

You don't have to raise your hand,

but if you haven't felt like this, please see me after church – I want to know your secret!

The fact of the matter is...we've probably all felt like this at one time or another.

Some of us have felt that way at times in the past.

Some of us may be feeling that way right now.

Some of the empty seats beside us may be those of people who are feeling so depressed
that they couldn't get out of bed and come here today.

No matter who we are, there are times when we get down or depressed or even despairing,

times when we are buffeted by the winds and waves of the circumstances in our lives,
times when our emotions overwhelm us and we feel like we're drowning.

At these times we feel all alone, as if no one has ever felt this way before. And yet they have. Everyone has.

Our reading today certainly points to that fact.

Over half of the psalms are ascribed to King David and over half of his psalms are psalms of lament.

King David was one of only three kings to rule over the united kingdom of Israel at its height.

He had power, he had fame, he had wealth, and he had love –

more than 10 concubines and more than 7 wives, including his beloved Bathsheba.

From just about anyone else's perspective, David had it all.

And yet there were many times when he was overwhelmed by sorrow & grief, hurt & pain, anger & despair.

Just as we are.

So what do we do in those times?

The psalms of lament show us 2 things that can help: speak the pain and claim the promise.

Generally speaking, I don't recommend that we talk too much about our sufferings

because the more we talk about negative things, the more negative things we bring into our lives.

That's not to say you can't share with a counselor or a trusted friend what you're feeling;

it's just important to phrase things positively instead of negatively.

So instead of complaining about how sick I feel, I can say, "I can't wait until I'm feeling better".

Instead of saying that I have a pain in my neck,

I can say, "I'm looking forward to the muscles in my neck relaxing".

Instead of talking about how lonely I feel, I can say, "I'm praying for God to heal my heart".

But there is one time when we can be brutally frank and honest about what we are feeling – and that’s in prayer.

We can tell God the whole sorry truth of our lives.

We can name every hurt and every sorrow.

We can express any and all emotions.

God already knows exactly how we feel, so we might as well speak our pain out loud!

When we do that, it takes it out of ourselves.

It’s like a dirty house.

The only way you can make a clean is to get rid of the dirt.

So whenever you hurt, do what David did, and speak your pain to God.

And then *immediately* claim your promise.

Jesus cast out many demons – but he was very careful in the process

because he knew that if you cast out 1 demon and you leave the host vacant, 7 more demons can enter.

It’s like cleaning a house and then abandoning it.

You can get it in perfect condition, but if no one lives there, dust and dirt will accumulate and eventually the house will fall into rack and ruin.

If you speak your pain and leave it at that, you just leave yourself empty so that more pain can come in.

So after you speak your pain it’s important to claim your promise –

the promise God made to you in baptism:

*“You have been buried, therefore, by baptism into Christ,
so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,
you, too, might walk in newness of life.”*

At the very moment when we are feeling like we’re drowning, we should remember our baptism.

Now for those of us baptized as infants

or even those baptized when old enough to remember, but by sprinkling or pouring instead of immersion,

it’s a bit more difficult to make the connection

between feeling like we’re drowning and finding hope in our baptism.

The good thing about infant baptism is of course the rational knowledge that God’s grace is pure gift –

there is nothing we did, or are doing, or can ever do to earn God’s love.

But what we miss with this practice is the experiential knowledge of actually being in that place

where the waters have closed in over us and we find ourselves drowning, being buried with Christ,

and then suddenly we are raised from that watery grave to new life.

Being surrounded by water is not just the gateway to death, it is the gateway to life.

For even though we could be drowned in the ocean,

every one of us has been completely surrounded by water before – inside our mothers.

From out of our mothers’ watery wombs we emerged to have life,

and from out of the waters of baptism we emerge to new life in the Spirit.

So many times we may feel like we’re drowning but in those times we need to remember

that the water that threatens to drown us is also the water that gives us life.

At the beginning of the psalm, David cries out, “Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck!”

Yet at the end of the psalm, David thirsts for water, and is given only vinegar to drink.

Even Jesus experienced the same sense of drowning.

Jesus, fully human, knew grief and sorrow, pain and fear, loneliness and despair.

Jesus prayed, “Oh, God, let this cup pass from me!”

Jesus lived out this psalm as he exclaimed, “I thirst” and received only vinegar to drink.

Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?!”

Jesus, like David, spoke his pain to God, but also claimed the promise.

“Nevertheless, not my will but yours be done.”

“On the third day the Son of Man will be raised from the dead.”

“Into your hands I commend my spirit.”

When we feel the water is up to our neck,
when we feel we are sinking down into the mire and the muck,
when we're too tired to struggle to stay afloat,
we need to remember to speak our pain and claim our promise.

And then we need to wait in trust and hope and faith
because there will always be some measure of time
between the time we claim our promise and the time the promise is fulfilled.
It's not because God is not there; it's not because God does not care.

When we're going through our stuff, we are focused inward, and all we see and all we hear and all we feel
is what's going on inside of us.

But we are not the only character in the story.

We're not the only actor on stage.

We're not the only player in the game.

We are part of a much larger picture, part of a bigger story.

The reasons that we may find ourselves down and depressed and despairing may be of our own making
or we may have played a part in the situation,
or we may be completely innocent.

The fact is, we all have free will and we all think things and say things and do things that hurt others
and many times we may not even be aware of it.

And so the things that happen to us, the things that people say to us, the things that people do to us,
may cause us pain and hurt, just as the things that we say and do may cause pain and hurt to others.

None of that is God's fault,

and there's no way God can prevent such things from happening, or keep us from being hurt
without taking away our autonomy.

But God is there. And God does care.

God is with us in the water, holding us and loving us, and never letting go.

When we fall down, God will help us up.

When we get hurt, God will bandage our wounds.

When our tears fall, God will wipe them away.

So when you lie in your bed, too broken to get up, speak your pain and God will heal it.

Claim your promise and God will keep it.

When the waters of sorrow and grief, pain and fear, loneliness and despair threaten to drown you,
remember that you have not only been buried with Christ by baptism into death,
you have been born anew in those same waters.

Ask and it will be given, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.

Out of sickness God brings health, out of sorrow, joy, out of despair, hope,
out of fear, faith, out of loneliness, love, out of death, life.

As God saved Noah and his family from drowning,

as God led Israel from slavery through the sea into freedom,

and as Jesus offered the Samaritan woman living water to drink, so are we saved by the waters of baptism.

When you find yourself drowning in despair, speak your pain and claim your promise.

And as you wait for that promise to be fulfilled, remember,

*"You have been buried, therefore, by baptism into Christ,
so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,
you, too, might walk in newness of life."*

Speak your pain. Claim your promise.

And trust that the promise is on its way. **Amen!**