

Psalm 130  
“In the Waiting Room”

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Roslindale Congregational Church, UCC, Roslindale, MA  
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*Introduction:*

*Today we begin a series of sermons on three of the Psalms. The 130<sup>th</sup> Psalm is the first in this series. It is one of the Songs of Ascents. Jewish pilgrims would recite or chant these Psalms as they traveled on the way up to Jerusalem for religious festivals. It is also categorized as a Psalm of Lament for a person in trouble.*

*The Reading:*

<sup>1</sup> *Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.*

<sup>2</sup> *Lord, hear my voice!*

*Let your ears be attentive  
to the voice of my supplications!*

<sup>3</sup> *If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,  
Lord, who could stand?*

<sup>4</sup> *But there is forgiveness with you,  
so that you may be revered.*

<sup>5</sup> *I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,  
and in his word I hope;*

<sup>6</sup> *my soul waits for the Lord  
more than those who watch for the morning,  
more than those who watch for the morning.*

<sup>7</sup> *O Israel, hope in the Lord!  
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,  
and with him is great power to redeem.*

<sup>8</sup> *It is he who will redeem Israel  
from all its iniquities.*

This week, I felt drawn to a book of poetry by Lawrence Ferlinghetti.<sup>1</sup> He was a part of the “Beat poets” of the 1950s, and this poem, “I Am Waiting,” was likely set to jazz music. Here’s an excerpt:

*I am waiting for my number to be called, and I am waiting for the living end, and I am waiting for dad to come home, his pockets full of irradiated silver dollars, and I am waiting for the atomic tests to end, and I am waiting happily for things to get much worse before they improve...and I am waiting for forests and animals to reclaim the earth as theirs and I am waiting for a way to be devised to destroy all nationalisms without killing anybody.*

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *A Coney Island of the Mind* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1958), 49.

**He's in the waiting room. You know what that is like, right?** You've waited at the RMV or in an airport security line; in a room before your doctor's appointment or for a table at a restaurant. Some folks these days also wait online, for other video gamers to show up to play, for instance. People also wait for construction to end, for the garden to ripen, and school to start again.

**The 'waiting room' serves as a metaphor for the transition into some new kind of existence.** You're in it if you are waiting for a relationship to mature or become better; for a future dream to open up; for a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world. And I think that we are all in the waiting room for the Pandemic to be over and for people to wake up, get vaccinated, practice safety protocols, and at least be concerned for, if not *love*, their neighbors! Can I get an "Amen?!"

My experience with cancer certainly involved time in waiting rooms, both literal and figurative! I awaited results of multiple tests and spent hours in treatment and recovery, as my husband, Steve, sat near to me and played crossword puzzles on his phone to pass the time.

A couple of weeks after I had completed chemo, I was back in that same waiting room at Dana Farber, but just for a check-up. I was surprised by the physical and emotional impact of being there. My body remembered what it had been like – the sights, sounds, and smells. This time I looked around at all the patients there with me, new faces to me, awaiting their infusions, and I was overcome by tears that turned into prayers for them and gratitude for the staff that care for us day in and day out. At *that* moment, it was as if I had entered a *different kind* of waiting room. I was still in the same chair, but I was in a different mode of waiting, one that wasn't only concerned with biding time and surviving, but intent upon seeking spiritual light!

Today Psalm 130 is testifying to this different kind of waiting room. "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Creator... I wait for God; my soul waits, and in God's word I hope." **The Psalmist is in God's waiting room, seeking spiritual light.**

We don't know the context of these words exactly. "The depths" probably alludes to the hostile, chaotic forces that are opposed to God, and the Psalmist laments them. It was a distressing time, personally and nationally, and she is waiting for forgiveness, trusting in God's mercy. Like us, she is waiting for divine promises to be kept and God's greater will to be done. The Psalmist is waiting on tiptoes, watching as intently as the guarding soldier waiting for the dawn, watching for the sun to rise.

Psalm 130 was later adopted into a collection of traveling songs that faithful pilgrims would sing as they climbed the hills up to Jerusalem to attend religious festivals. During their processional, we can imagine their impatient children waiting and interrupting their songs: "Are we there, yet?"

**But what makes being in God's waiting room different from just waiting is that it is not boring or passive, but an active waiting with hope.**

*This* waiting is not a waste of time at all, but time being fulfilled. When we are in God's waiting room, we practice believing that God is *already* at work, *ahead* of us. That's why we have hope. Like Eugene Petersen puts it: "God is always doing something before I know it. So the task is not to get God to do something I think needs to be done,

but to become aware of what God *is* doing so that I can respond, participate, and delight in it.”<sup>2</sup>

It’s like jumping rope, you know, that moment when the other two are swinging the rope and you are able to enter at exactly the right time to jump it.

**God’s waiting room is the exact right place for us to be amid today’s challenges.** It is a spiritual space that you can enter at *any* time – during the search for your next pastor and as you step out as a congregation into Roslindale – a kind of waiting that lets your souls grow up<sup>3</sup> and by which you can make out the foundations of God’s New Creation.

Ferlinghetti again: *I am waiting for the last long careless rapture, and I am perpetually waiting for the fleeing lovers on the Grecian Urn to catch each other up at last and embrace, and I am awaiting perpetually and forever a renaissance of wonder!*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Rodney Clapp, “Eugene Petersen: A Monk Out of Habit,” *Christianity Today*, April 3, 1987, 25.

<sup>3</sup>Sue Monk Kidd, *When The Heart Waits* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 22. When Kidd visits at St. Meinrad Archabbey, she is uncomfortable with the quiet and the slow pace. The monk tells her that when she is waiting, she is not doing nothing; she is letting her soul grow up.

<sup>4</sup>Ferlinghetti, 53.