

Advent Devotional December 2, 2019

Scripture

Psalm 40

*1 I waited patiently for the LORD;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
2 He drew me up from the desolate pit,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.
3 He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the LORD.
4 Happy are those who make
the LORD their trust,
who do not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after false gods.
5 You have multiplied, O LORD my God,
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;
none can compare with you.
Were I to proclaim and tell of them,
they would be more than can be counted.
6 Sacrifice and offering you do not desire,
but you have given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering
you have not required.
7 Then I said, "Here I am;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me.
8 I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart."
9 I have told the glad news of deliverance
in the great congregation;
see, I have not restrained my lips,
as you know, O LORD.
10 I have not hidden your saving help within my heart,
I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation;
I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness
from the great congregation.
11 Do not, O LORD, withhold
your mercy from me;
let your steadfast love and your faithfulness
keep me safe forever.
12 For evils have encompassed me
without number;
my iniquities have overtaken me,
until I cannot see;
they are more than the hairs of my head,
and my heart fails me.*

13 *Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me;
O LORD, make haste to help me.*
14 *Let all those be put to shame and confusion
who seek to snatch away my life;
let those be turned back and brought to dishonor
who desire my hurt.*
15 *Let those be appalled because of their shame
who say to me, "Aha, Aha!"*
16 *But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation
say continually, "Great is the LORD!"*
17 *As for me, I am poor and needy,
but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God.*

Devotional

The Rev. Lisa S. Heckman '98

Whenever I read Psalm 40, the song that sings through my head is not an Advent hymn or a Christmas carol, but a spiritual from an old 1970s book of praise songs. As much as I love, love, love Christmas music, the nostalgia of perfect Christmases past or images of a clean, sweet-smelling stable with fluffy sheep and silent nights is contrary to the messy world into which God came.

Real life has us stuck in miry bogs of loneliness, stress, or life-the-way-it's-always-been that are not healthy. We battle evils of apathy, entitlement, and pervading public meanness. And we constantly confront those who want to snatch away our lives with too many holiday responsibilities, expectations of perfection, or all we "should" be, think, and do.

Immanuel, God-with-us, became flesh in Jesus to move into our messy neighborhoods, right where we are—and with us as *who* we are. Jesus came to lead us out of the bogs, fight evil with the strength of love, and deliver us from the snatchers of life. God is present right now, in this moment of living, whether we're in a muddy pit or standing on solid rock. The Incarnation didn't begin and end 2000+ years ago, nor is it only the means of gaining a seat in heaven someday. Jesus is with us now, in *our* neighborhoods, neighbors, family, friends, . . . even enemies.

In thanksgiving we sing songs to tell the world of God's enduring, unconditional love and faithfulness. May we not restrain our lips or hide from proclaiming what we've learned about God. Those are songs the world needs to hear more than the carols that play on endless loop this season. So . . .

*"You can tell the world about this! You can tell the nations you're blessed.
Tell them that Jesus makes you whole and he brings the joy, joy to your soul!"
(Traditional spiritual [alt.]*

Prayer

Yahweh of the low places, high places, and all the places in between, may we seek you in times of trouble. May we declare your marvelous deeds in times of triumph. May we walk with you every ordinary day, knowing that life is better—and we can be better ourselves—when we share our days with

you. Put new songs in our mouths to sing praise to you each and every day so the world can know you and the nations hear how greatly you have blessed us. Amen.