

**The 130th Psalm  
for  
the 130th Anniversary of Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis**

**+A PSALM FOR YOUR BALM - AT ONE-THIRTY +**

**Robert W. Bertram**

+The Invocation+

+The Hymn+

De Profundis (TLH, #664)  
(Antiphon by officiant)

+The Meditation+

I.

The Psalm

Reader: Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord!  
Lord, hear my voice,  
Let thy ears be attentive  
to the voice of my supplications.'

The Message

The Refrain

Officiant: Happy birthday, old Sem,  
Old sinful,  
Old fearing, forgiven,  
Old watching and waiting,  
Old hope-along, Israelite Sem!

People: Waiting? Yes.  
But old? No.  
We're not nearing evening  
but morning.  
We're still to be born.  
We wait in reverse  
from the night to the dawn.  
The countdown is on.  
What a birthday, O Lord!  
O Lord,  
what a birthday!

II.

The Psalm

Reader: If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities,  
Lord, who could stand?  
But there is forgiveness with thee,  
that thou mayest be feared.

The Message

The Refrain  
(See above)

III.

The Psalm

Reader: I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,  
and in his word I hope;  
my soul waits for the Lord  
more than watchmen for the morning,  
more than watchmen for the morning.

The Message

The Refrain  
(See above)

IV.

The Psalm

Reader: O Israel, hope in the Lord!  
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,  
and with him is plenteous redemption,  
And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

The Message

The Refrain  
(See above)

+The Blessing+

The Message. I.

"Out of the depths:" out of -what depths? Our depths of learning? Really, now. Our depths of feeling? No, deeper than that. Our depths of sin! And not merely that sin

about which we manage to feel deeply, but that sin which is too deep to be felt. That sin which we can't even identify and analyze. That sin for which we can find no words except a groan: "Abba, Father," "O Jesus." That sin which we are too sinful to recognize, even to care about. That sin for which all we can muster is, as the psalmist says, our "supplications."

Out of whose depths? Not just yours and yours and mine, each by each. But out of the depths of this whole iniquitous bunch, this Sem whole and entire. Out of whatever depths we are locked together in this most intricate conspiracy of mutual criticism and gossip, of contagious fear, of polarization and isolation, and therefore mutual hurt. We're all in these deeps together. And not only those of us who are in this room, not even only those who are now on campus-- say, those who are down in Loeber watching TV (we don't find it hard to implicate them, do we?)—but also those at this place who have gone before: the Walthers and Piepers and all the thousands of nameless, dead and forgotten ones whose sin lives on to afflict you and me and by whose honor we are still put to shame—130 years of it. Out of the depths of 130 years, O Lord, goes this "supplication" you just heard from us—this unfeeling, rote memorized, read-out-of-a-hymnal, recited "supplication." Listen, Lord. Lord!

The Refrain.

### The Message. II.

"... That thou mayest be feared": do you mean that is what his forgiveness is for? "There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared"? Shouldn't it read rather: that thou mayest be loved? What is it, fear or love? The answer is Yes. For how does The Catechism say, ten times over, for every one of the commandments? "We should fear and love God ...." More than that, it is only because he is loveable, only because "there is forgiveness with" him, that we can feel free enough to fear him in the first place.

To fear him, that is the point. It is not that without him around we would run out of things and persons to fear, especially persons. Hardly. This community, even this community, is dominated by men-fearers. We fear the change-makers or the ecclesiastical-political opposition. So we start to wield the axe and let heads roll, withholding explanations and resorting to secrecy and cliques. I repeat, it is fear that does that. Others of us fear the executioners themselves, in turn. Or more likely, we fear the criticism of our fellow-partisans, our accomplices, if we don't appropriately malign the executioners. Get that, we fear one another. We so fear one another—profs fear students and students fear one another—that we are afraid of hating the right enemies, the ones which hurt us all: like ignorance, for example—an enemy which we profs especially ought to hate with a passion every day. Worst of all, by our fear of one another we are prevented from love (which alone "casts out fear"), prevented from even enough love to stand up and be counted and to warn against the enemies of our own community.

What's at the bottom of all this men-fearing? We don't fear God, the only one who deserves to be feared, the only one the loss of whose love is something to worry about, the only one with whom there is forgiveness enough to liberate us to fear him alone.

But don't we fear him, at all—we who have enjoyed so much of his forgiveness, 130 years of it? Of course, we do. We must. If we did not, then (as the psalmist reasons) "who could stand"? And here we stand, big as life, right smack in front of him. Could we do that without fear—in other words, without forgiveness?

The Refrain.

### The Message. III.

Why does the psalmist repeat the phrase, "I say, more than they that watch for the morning"? Some textual critic might be tempted to explain this by suggesting that originally there had been another sentence in between, later omitted perhaps by some copyist's oversight, so that the original manuscript read:

My soul waits for the Lord more  
than they that watch for the morning.  
How's that?  
I say, more than they that watch for the  
morning.

Well, such a suggestion does contain an important half-truth. Anyone who waits the way the psalmist does, anyone who waits in that direction—not from day till night, not from youth till old age, not from life toward death, not from 1839 toward 1969, but "from the night to the dawn," from 1969 toward our Lord's return—that kind of waiter deserves a "how's that," a double-take. That kind of waiting is hardly self-evident. It is unnatural.

The word for that kind of waiting is "hope." "And in his word do I hope." That's all that waiters like you and me have, to pin our hope upon: "his word." Can you think of anything better? Yes, I can. And that will be along, too, one of these days—on his day. Meanwhile, I cannot think of anyone else's Word in which I would rather hope. Neither can you. That's why you're turned the way you are, toward the morning and not toward the night. And O Lord, what a morning! Beyond Godot there is God. And not just beyond, but very near—and nearer and nearer.

The Refrain.

### The Message. IV.

"O Israel." O Sem, how like Israel you are! And not only like Israel. You are part of the latter-day Israel. Those of you who like to speak of us, the church, as "the new Israel," please don't. That is misleading. That is not the way the New Testament speaks. There is not some old Israel which has come to an end and which we in turn have now replaced.

We are the continuation of that selfsame Israel, marching on our hopeful pilgrimage in that same direction toward the coming morning. Our hope is in the same promise. And it is not in spite of the intervening Jesus Christ, but precisely because of him—Go promise kept—that the promise to us, the Goyim, is the same promise, and our hope is the same hope. And so is the morning ahead. We, too, are Israel.

For us too, then, there is "steadfast love." For us too there is "plenteous redemption." And us, too, will be redeemed from all our iniquities. We hope to God that is true. And what better reason for hoping. So here's to you, good Sem—at one-thirty. Here's hoping. .

In the Name of the  
Father  
and of the  
Son  
and of the Holy Ghost.

The Refrain.

Robert W. Bertram  
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