

Fifth Sunday in Lent, Gospel Year A

TAKEN OUT OF THE DEPTHS

Psalm 130

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Analysis by Timothy Hoyer

1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

2 Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

3 If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

4 But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

5 I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;

6 my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning,

more than those who watch for the morning.

7 O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love,

and with him is great power to redeem.

8 It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.



DIAGNOSIS: We Go Ever Deeper

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): We Are in It Up to Our Chin

Grounding: The author of the psalm is in “the depths.” Something he has done bothers him, and makes him feel despised by God.

Tracking: In peoples’ lives, we often hear about someone whom the family does not want to talk. Perhaps the person is in prison for a violent crime or for stealing money from the family member’s employer. The family feels shame. They don’t want to talk about it. And the family member in prison is not only dealing with the consequences of his crime, but is also dealing with being cut off from the family—scorned, blamed, and told his predicament is all his fault. Or perhaps the problem is alcoholism—which leads to job loss, inability to pay the heating bill, maybe divorce. No one wants to get involved in it, meaning

they will not help. He is in the depths crying out. We may even fear finding ourselves in these same depths.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Our Hearts Feel Like They Are Drowning

Grounding: So there is the doer of the deed. And then there is the doer being affected by the consequences of his own deed—feeling accused, judged, and condemned, cut off, left alone, and not worth associating with. The thing that bothers the doer is the law, God’s law. He feels he cannot stand with pride before God. He cannot stand before God with a clean conscience. He fears God is fully aware of what he has done. He says with terror, referring to God, “He knows!”

Tracking: So there are the deeds we do that we don’t want others to know about. Not that the deed is private, but that the deed was wrong, hurtful, it broke a law—a criminal or civil or social custom, or offended someone. For example, we do not like sitting in our car with a police car behind us while the police officer writes up a speeding ticket. Everyone who drives by sees us. What if someone we know drives by? We don’t want to be witnessed in our misdeed. Suddenly, what we have done seems much worse. It puts us into the depths of despair. We question our worth.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): There Is No Way Out

Grounding: The law does not allow an escape from the depths. If God should mark iniquities, who could stand? The psalmist realizes he has no way to escape God’s judgment. The author has no excuse, no explanation, no mitigating circumstances. He knows he has no way to make it up to God for what he has done. To not be able to stand before God means he has no defense.

Tracking: The law traps us in the feeling that our life is worthless. If we have hurt someone, we can try to make it up to

them; but that person establishes the price we pay, and can make us pay again and again. Under their judgment we cannot feel comfortable. We never feel confident that all is well or that with time life will get better. We fear that we will be treated with disdain or that the offended person will become distant. We may react with anger because we are hurt. We may react by saying we don't care what others think, or that we will do what we want, but such assertions end relationships. And any end is a death. We are trapped in a system that judges us and we can't escape. We may give up in despair, which is again an end and a death. We may call upon God, but since God seems to do nothing to get us out of this judgment, it appears God agrees with the judgment.

PROGNOSIS: We Are Pulled Up Like Peter Was

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Jesus Is the Way Through

Ground ing:

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has made a promise to forgive, a promise made real in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the son of God. Jesus' death is an end to death, for he rises from death. Jesus' death ends judgment; he rises to a new life where there the old creation is gone, including the system of judgment. Jesus' death is the new

way of grace and mercy and forgiveness. Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of the life under God's way of grace and mercy and forgiveness. We have been bought back—redeemed—from judgment and death, given life, peace, and forgiveness. The old has been buried with Christ. We are raised with him, and are remade in Christ.

Crossing: The law allows no way out, but Jesus provides us a way through death to new life. Jesus pulls us out of our shame through his shame on the cross, and through his cross we are the pride of God. He pulls up from the depths of our fear of not being good enough, and fills us with his goodness ("Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" Matthew 5.). Where we could not stand before, now we can stand in Jesus. Where we felt life was lost, we now have life in Jesus. In Jesus we have died to the law (judgment) and now live in him. Life is not only about how others judge us, for now God gives us his verdict of forgiveness in Jesus. Our end becomes the beginning of new life in Jesus. We are baptized into Jesus, into the depths of the waters of baptism, and raised up as people in Christ.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): We Are Given New Hearts

Grounding: The psalmist proclaims God forgives so that God may be revered, trusted, clung to in hope. He expresses his faith that God forgives him by his urging of all people to wait for the Lord, to wait for God's forgiveness like those in the dark wait for the morning. As surely as the morning will come, so will God's forgiveness. God's forgiveness through Jesus comes as God declares it in the Rite of Confession and Forgiveness ("I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."), or in the Lord's Supper ("This cup is the new

covenant in my blood shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins"). The one who trusts Jesus tells others that Jesus forgives us.

Crossing: Life is not worthless because it no longer rests solely on judgment. Jesus shows us his way of mercy. Where we experienced despair, Jesus fills us with hope. Instead of trusting the law's accusation and condemnation, we now trust Jesus and his promise of forgiveness. We are made right. We are declared good. Jesus has made us so.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): We Hold to a Life Preserver

Grounding: The psalmist proclaims that the Lord will redeem people from all their iniquities, and that, with the Lord, there is steadfast love. Sure, the psalmist has been in the depths because of his own action, but in Christ there is now forgiveness. Jesus' forgiveness reigns over it all.

Crossing: If the person we hurt is also someone who trusts Jesus, then we can go to that person trusting that they will act out of their trust in Jesus. We can go to the person and say we were wrong, that they were right for judging us, but that now, for Jesus' sake, will they please forgive us, bury the wrong and the hurt, and forgive us. We can hope they will forgive us like those who wait for the morning. If the person does not trust Jesus, we can still turn to them (repent) to say we were wrong, we are sorry, and ask for their forgiveness, and ask to work together to act in better ways toward each other. If they forgive us, that is good; if not, maybe they will; if never, their judgment is not the last word, because Jesus' forgiveness lifts us up out of the depths.

In our relationship with the person we hurt—the same person who has forgiven us—we live in Jesus' new way together. No longer do

we live under a system of judgment, waiting for the other to fail to live up to our expectations. Now we live looking for how to give love (grace), how to serve the other in ways that help and encourage (mercy), and we live to give forgiveness, not accusations or pointing out mistakes. We assure the other that forgiveness has made them right with us and God, so we tell them something like, "Jesus makes you good."