

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Gospel Year A

CAUGHT AND RELEASED

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Psalm 66:8-20

Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

*8Bless our God, O peoples,
let the sound of his praise be heard,
9who has kept us among the living,
and has not let our feet slip.
10For you, O God, have tested us;
you have tried us as silver is tried.
11You brought us into the net;
you laid burdens on our backs;
12you let people ride over our heads;
we went through fire and through water;
yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.
13I will come into your house with burnt offerings;
I will pay you my vows,
14those that my lips uttered
and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.
15I will offer to you burnt offerings of fatlings,
with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams;
I will make an offering of bulls and goats.
Selah
16Come and hear, all you who fear God,
and I will tell what he has done for me.
17I cried aloud to him,
and he was extolled with my tongue.*

*18 If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,
the LORD would not have listened.
19 But truly God has listened;
he has given heed to the words of my prayer.
20 Blessed be God,
because he has not rejected my prayer
or removed his steadfast love from me.*



DIAGNOSIS: Caught in the Net

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Going Unheard (v. 8)

No one knows what is going on behind the closed doors of our socially-distanced homes these days. This coronavirus pandemic has isolated our praise to our own homes, and who knows if its even happening there. "If a tree falls in the forest, and nobody

is there, does it make a sound?" Who knows what words are being spoken by those who (at least, ostensibly) fear the Lord? Of course, those with a camera and microphone to capture the praise might be heard—but, then, who's to say whether the praise is authentic or staged?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Tested

Truth be told, there are enough reasons not to praise God: Essential workers, whom we indulgently call "heroes," are reluctantly or willingly placing themselves in harm's way. Some step into the fray (grocery store clerks, or fast food servers, for instance) to avoid being casualties of mass unemployment. Others do it because they are trained and, in the best of circumstances, actually feel called to help those susceptible to the virus. This willingness to serve, doesn't make the doers feel any less vulnerable or "tested"; it just means they knew that risk came with the vocation. But, then, even they might be tempted to ask why God would call them to accept a calling that put them (and everyone they go home to) at risk. None of it seems fair.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): You Brought Us into the Net

It seems that this whole human experience—especially where a pandemic is involved—is just one big net for us to get snagged in. Try to make an honest living, at a barely livable wage, and you get punished for it. Try to listen to the voice that calls you to serve others (whatever name you give that voice), and you get snared in other people's bad luck and reckless choices. What kind of God would lay such burdens on our backs? What kind of God would let others run over our heads?

The self-same God has questions for us too: What kind of humans would waste time trying to exact blame on God, when the neighbor

needs her? What kind of twisted human economy would allow the poorest brothers and sisters, to be put at risk, without making every effort to preserve the struggling worker's health and means of making a living?

PROGNOSIS: Brought Out into a Spacious Place



Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Word of God Speaks (vv. 16-20)

The God who sees us being tried, is the very same one who himself has been tested. He cried to the Lord, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Faithfully, to his dying breath, he called on God. At first there was a lingering silence, where no breath was left in him, and he was laid in a borrowed tomb. Would he have chosen such a fate, had he a choice? No. Instead, the cup he prayed would be taken from him was not, and he breathed his last. No lover of God would choose such an end, but it was a righteous death; Jesus had no iniquity in his heart. And ... and ... the Father listened, and brought him "through fire

and through water” to a “spacious place” (v. 12): Resurrection. So it is that Jesus is able to invite us to join the story of resurrection. Truly God has listened, and given heed to Jesus’ prayer: Because he lives, we shall also live (John 14:19).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Come and Hear (v. 16)

That “spacious place” that Jesus was brought into in the resurrection? It is a place he invites us to live in and for ourselves. Our trials become his trials, and his trials help us to make sense of our badly wounded world. We hear what God has done for his beloved Son, and we trust that such care is ours also. We may go through fire and water, but in the end what Jesus has will be ours too. We may feel as if we are being tested but, like silver that is tried, we see that God is refining us for the sake of our neighbor in need.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Bless Our God, O Peoples (v. 8)

Now we have reason to praise God. Because of Christ, God will carry us through trials into spacious places. So we join Jesus in blessing God. With Jesus, who called on the Father in joy and pain, we raise our voices to extol God with our tongues. Will anyone hear our praise in these pandemic days of isolation? Jesus’ resurrection testifies that the God who invites us to call out, also promises to listen, holding us in steadfast love.