Open

Psalm 131

Buckingham Church

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Rochelle A. Stackhouse

How do you get ready to come to worship on a Sunday? Have some breakfast? Take a shower? Choose what you will wear? Make sure your car has enough gas? Sit down and turn on your computer or other electronic device?

How do you get ready to worship?

That’s what this Psalm is about. It’s a Psalm of Ascent; Psalms 120-134 are Psalms that were sung as people walked, sometimes for days, to come to Jerusalem to worship at the Temple. As our ancient ancestors in faith prepared to worship, they traveled, and they sang.

They sang about lots of different thoughts and feelings. “I lift my eyes to the hills; from where will my help come?” “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!” “Have mercy on us, O Lord!” “Our help is in the Lord who made heaven and earth.” “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build do so in vain.” “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.” “O how very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity.” And much, much more. Check out those short Psalms. These were the popular songs of their day, but they were also those which prepared the worshipers to enter into a deeper relationship with God. They were songs to open up hearts, minds, and spirits.

Open.

Our ancestors in faith believed that before they got to worship, they needed to make sure their hearts, minds, and spirits were open to receiving whatever God had to give them. Not stuff, but teaching, calling to vocation or service, ideas, comfort, hope, challenge, rebuke, forgiveness. A new journey, perhaps, or guidance for an old one.

This Psalm is about that openness. The person preparing for a time spent with God and with others in their faith community did a diagnostic on their mental and spiritual attitudes in order to open them up to God.

The Psalm lays out the questions to ask ourselves like this: Am I just a little arrogant maybe? Thinking I’m pretty special because I made this journey all the way to Jerusalem, even when I was tired, and so I will be impressive to God and to other people? I showed up!

Am I just a little proud, perhaps? Am I looking down on others around me because of how they are dressed or where they live or because they are old, or young, or different in some way? Or because I come to worship all the time and I’ve not seen them around much lately?

Am I a bit too self-assured? A bit too certain that I am sufficient to my needs and don’t need anything from anyone? Do I think that independence is the most important thing there is? Do I hold myself just a little apart and invulnerable? Thinking maybe God doesn’t really care or know what I think or do?

The one preparing for worship takes inventory on their mental, emotional, and spiritual status on the way to their encounter with God and in the presence of other worshippers. Now there’s a concept. And then, they calm and quiet themselves like a weaned child, maybe the weaned child walking near them.

Why a weaned child? That’s kind of specific. Well, a child still nursing **knows** they are completely dependent on their parents. Nursing children are completely open and vulnerable in the presence of the ones who care for them naturally.

But a weaned child has some experience of the world. And when they return to their parents, they do so knowing there are other choices out there. They come back because those relationships are central to their lives, and they trust in them. The weaned child who climbs on a parent’s lap chooses to be open and vulnerable, not too proud, not arrogantly standing aloof, not judging themselves better than their parents, instead ready and willing to enter into a loving relationship, indeed admitting they need just that.

The Psalmist sings that this is the attitude to bring into an encounter with God and other people in worship. According to Mark’s gospel, Jesus said kind of the same thing when he said that anyone who does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it, as he then welcomed children to his lap.

And here’s the thing: the point of worship is to enter more deeply into relationship with God in such a way that we are continually changed into the kind of people God so yearns for us to be. So, if we work on that prep every time we come to worship, maybe, just maybe, it will bleed over into the rest of our lives. Maybe, just maybe, we will continue to evolve into the kind of people who recognize God’s realm, work toward God’s realm, and yearn for the day when all the world is a place where everyone can feel safe, secure, trusting, and able to be vulnerable, just like a child who climbs with open love onto a parent’s lap. Amen.