

7-19-2020 SERMON CCI Psalm 42: 1-8 Remembering Well

It's our last Sunday worshipping from this space. I imagine we have lots of different feelings- sadness and even depression saying goodbye to what's familiar, questioning where God is, resignation, anger or frustration, fear. Some may feel relief from the pressure. Lots of emotions. I chose Psalm 42 because it speaks beautifully to what we are going through.

Psalm 42 was written by the Sons of Korah who were the song leaders, the song writers for worship in the Jerusalem Temple. They had the privilege of leading God's people as they processed up the hill to the Temple singing and clapping and praising God with the trumpets, stringed instruments and cymbals playing loudly as the people sang. We're pretty quiet sitting in our cars on our way to church today, so imagine: Walking together to church every Sunday with Dorothy and Al Hay leading us in singing with the Issaquah Symphony playing and the Issaquah Singers singing with us, calling people from their homes to come join the procession. Everyone shaking hands and hugging as they join the growing crowd. Everyone so excited to worship together in God's house!

Only, in Psalm 42, all of that is just a sad, thirsty memory during a dry time. The Psalmist is no longer in Jerusalem, no longer able to gather with God's people, and the joy is gone. It's like the Psalmist was thirsty sitting beside Elijah's dry brook. "As the deer pants for water, so my soul longs for You, God." As we sang these words earlier, we often imagine a graceful deer lapping up cool water from a stream. But the deer pictured here is panting for water, a dry, thirsty deer, perhaps even starving, with no food or water; this deer is in trouble if it doesn't find water soon. The psalmist feels that dryness and longing. Haven't we had a taste of that longing since COVID-19 pushed us out of our worship space? Thirsty for "real" in-person worship? Haven't we asked, like the Psalmist, "**When** can I go and meet with God?"

With a dry and thirsty heart, the Psalmist begins to remember the good old days. ***For I used to go along with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God, with the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival. And again, I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.*** The Psalmist begins to remember God's faithfulness through all of history in all places. From the Jordan River, to Mount Hermon where Moses received the 10 commandments and Elijah heard God's still small voice. Even from Mount Mizar that was such an insignificant mountain that no one knows where it was. And that is what we have done this morning.

Remembered together just a tiny portion of the ways God has been so good to us in this space. Remembering the big and small ways God has been with us. Because remembering shifts where our eyes are looking- from what's happening around us and what we are feeling upward to a focus on God's goodness and faithfulness that has not changed. Remembering doesn't change our situation at all, but it does change how we look at our situation and puts it into God's perspective.

Then the Psalmist preaches to himself. ***Why are you downcast, O my soul? Put your hope in God.*** Ever lecture or preach to yourself? Give yourself a pep talk? Instead of just listening to his discouragement, the Psalmist preaches to himself about putting his hope in God, of not giving in to despair, of letting **God** have the last word, not the situation. It's so easy to listen to the thoughts and feelings that flood our minds and treat them as though they are the ultimate truth. Psalm 42 encourages us to talk back to ourselves when those discouraged thoughts and feelings come. To remind ourselves of God's goodness and faithfulness. And to praise God even when we're down, dry, or feeling hopeless. ***And yet I will praise him.*** To choose to praise God anyway for his past goodness and praise God in advance for what we cannot see.

I know that your plan for this year was to call a new pastor to do a bridge ministry- that would minister to those who are here now, but invest most of their time starting something new for younger people that would outlive you in ministering to Issaquah in Jesus' name. You've prayed and prayed; your pastoral search committee did great work gathering information about the church, about your dreams, and reading profiles of interested pastors. It was going well. In anticipation of calling a new pastor, another group was researching a new space that would allow the church to grow. There was a nervous excitement. And then COVID-19 hit. And like every other church in town, this congregation went online. It's been 4 ½ months and there is no date in sight for being able to safely gather again; it could be until the end of the year or longer. You made the decision to not renew the lease- not out of fear, but to honor the purpose of the church's mission and the endowment funds. This week, we will vacate the space. It's disappointing and even a bit scary.

4 ½ months ago I invited everyone to plant something in faith and hope that we would bring with us the first time we got to worship in this space again. That day is now not going to come. These are the zinnias I planted back then. The package says PURPLE ZINNIAS. I trusted the package. I'm not a great gardener, but even I can tell these are not the purple on the package, these are PINK ZINNIAS. I

could spend my time being upset that someone put pink seeds in a purple seed packet, blaming the company for my disappointment, accusing them of false advertising, even want my money back. Pink wasn't what I wanted. Or I can choose to see the beauty of pink and praise the God who created pink zinnias as well as purple. And just perhaps, the packaging error happened for just this moment. Will we open our eyes to see God's hand in this disappointing situation? I wanted purple and got pink. You wanted a new pastor this year and got the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown. The pink zinnias are asking, "Will you say with the psalmist, Why, my soul, are you downcast?

Why so disturbed within me?

Put your hope in God,

for I will yet praise him, {I will praise him anyway}

my Savior and my God."

Heavenly Father, You are the God who sees the beginning and the end. You have been our strength through all times and in all places. We had such hopes for this year- for a new pastor, a new ministry in a new space. And here we are, unable to be together, and saying good-bye to this space with no certain future, other than your love and presence with us. Help us listen to the zinnias, and choose to remember your goodness and trust the future to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.