

First Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, MI
"Finding A Way"
Rev. Lou Nyiri
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This morning's message is based upon Psalm 25:1-10 and Mark 1:9-15, let's lean in & listen attentively...

Psalm 25:1-10 (New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)
Prayer for Guidance and for Deliverance Of David

- ¹ To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
² O my God, in you I trust;
do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.
³ Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.
⁴ Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
teach me your paths.
⁵ Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.
⁶ Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.
⁷ Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!
⁸ Good and upright is the Lord;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
⁹ He leads the humble in what is right
and teaches the humble his way.
¹⁰ All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

Mark 1:9-15 (New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)
The Baptism of Jesus

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. ¹¹ And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

The Testing of Jesus

¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, tested by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him.

The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news."

Let us Pray:

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.
Come as the fire and burn,
Come as the wind and cleanse,

Come as the light and reveal,
Convict us, Convert us, Consecrate us...until we are wholly thine.

And now, Lord, my prayer is simply this:
That the words of my mouth
And the words of all our hearts will be found pleasing and acceptable to you,
for you are our rock and our redeemer...Amen.

Sermon

If you are engaging this Lent with *The Poetry of Lent* you will read that today's Markan text is about repentance.

It is about turning around – facing one's life in a different direction – one that moves away from the things of this world which keep us tied down/tethered to living less than full lives – and focuses us on the call of God upon our lives.

Repentance – as the word comes to us in Mark's good news book – is *metanoia* – *meta* ("change") and *noia* ("mind").

As our Lenten guide suggests, we might think of it as "change of heart" or "change of life."

Recalling that Lent (and faith) is less about crippling restrictive guilt and more about God's redemptive grace – we find ourselves opened up to fulfilling and gratitude infused living...

As we remain open to our Lenten practices, we find ourselves wondering, what might we discover in this season (and beyond) that might impact our lives and the lives of those around us?

This morning, I'll suggest that Psalm 25 offers us a possibility.

I begin this line of thought excerpting lines from American Poet Mary Oliver's poem *Wild Geese*:

"Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

...

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
Are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,

The world offers itself to your imagination,

Calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –

Over and over announcing your place in the family of things."

Oliver's last line gets my attention, *Over and over announcing your place in the family of things*.

We're connected – we are not designed to go it alone – we are called into community – we are called to be family for each other.

Psalm 25 reminds God's people of this very concept.

The book of Psalms is a hymnbook for God's people.

Many psalms are upbeat songs of praise.

Psalm 25 though has a sorrowful feel to it – offered to God amid challenging and difficult times.

Psalm 25 asks for guidance and deliverance, speaks of enemies and treacherous people, reminds us of youthful sins, and makes the point that we are all sinners.

To borrow the words of Sir Elton John – Psalm 25 is a "sad song" that "says so much."

Philosopher at Loyola University Chicago, Mario Attie-Picker, purports, *our love of [sad songs] is not an appreciation of sadness; it is an appreciation of connection.*

To what then does Psalm 25 connect us.

Psalm 25's value comes from its honesty and accessibility – it reminds us about the things that make us feel terrible.

It also reminds us that our trust is in the God who is merciful and loving – the God who instructs sinners in the right way (of thinking, being and doing).

Psalm 25's good news is in the way it draws us closer to God and each other.

“To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.”

“O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.”
(Psalm 25:1-2)

In the face of a serious threat from enemies, the psalm-writer reaches out and asks God to “lift up my soul.”

First and foremost, Psalm 25 connects us to a higher power.

⁴ Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. ⁵ Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. ⁶ Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. (Psalm 25:4-6)

The LORD is “God of my salvation,” – the One who has the power to save and rescue us from enemies, trouble, or despair.

The LORD is also the One who shows mercy and “steadfast love” – a love that is referred to as *hesed* in the original Hebrew. *Hesed* is often translated as mercy, kindness, loving-kindness, or steadfast love. There is both a sense of eagerness and intention in *hesed*. The inference being that *hesed* is about choice – namely, God's choice to show us mercy, kindness, and love.

Psalm 25 connects us to the God of our salvation, the God who chooses to show us mercy and steadfast love.

A love which *calls to us like the wild geese,*

[hallowed]¹¹ and exciting –

announcing over and over our place in the family of things.

We are God's beloved children loved into being by God's *hesed* – God's steadfast loving mercy.

Secondly, Psalm 25 connects us with who we were and who we are becoming.

“Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!” (v. 7)

Once again, Psalm 25's authenticity and honesty speaks to our souls by connecting us to what we already know – what the Psalm calls “the sins of our youthful transgressions.”

Before we get mired in the weight of our past – let us not forget that – according to this Psalm – we are naming and confessing our sins to the God of steadfast love.

The God who **chooses to show us MERCY.**

It is this loving kindness which transforms past guilt and empowers us to become the creations God knows we can be.

¹¹ You will note that from here on out I modify Oliver's poem – changing harsh to “hallowed.”

We are connected to God and to each other – may our lives and actions announce over and over our place in the family of things – as God’s beloved children.

Amen and Amen.