

Synopsis of Sermon

Rich begins by positing that we all know what it feels like to be alone. And that at times Christians feel abandoned by God and, though we look for him, we cannot seem to find him.

The story of Ruth takes place during a time of war and famine, a time of where the problems of the day seemed so great that it was hard to believe that God would be concerned with the individual lives of those enduring it.

Rich tells the story of Naomi and her daughters-in-law, Orpa and Ruth. After each of their husbands died, Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to go back to their own tribes, but Ruth clings to Naomi.

Naomi was a woman who complained to God. So many people in the Bible found themselves abandoned and alone. Naomi laments to God, asking that she be called Marah, feeling bitter that God has abandoned her to be a stranger in a strange land. As a Christian we may be concerned that if we feel anger or abandonment that we have lost our faith that we are not Christians at all. Far from this being a sign of lack of faith, your willingness to voice complaint to God, to be that honest and raw with God shows a true faith in God. If we come to God to express our laments it is because we believe He is the ruler of the universe, that He does answer prayer, and He is good. Those who rely on themselves, who say, "I knew I had to depend only on myself anyhow", they are acting out of a lack of faith in the love of God.

When Naomi sends her daughters-in-law back to their homes, Ruth cleaves to Naomi. To Naomi she says, *"Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me."* Ruth 1:16-17 (NIV).

Rich reminds us that though we die alone, that is, no one can come with us in our death, Jesus will be with us. We will be with Christ in our death, and we will not be alone even then.

Ruth began picking up leftover grain from the field owned by Boaz. Boaz, saw that Ruth and Naomi were in need of a family protector. This story takes place in a culture that depends heavily on the provision of the family. Though Boaz had no direct obligation to take on the burden of Ruth or Naomi, he brought them in as their kinsmen redeemer. His adoption of them points to the actions of Jesus. Jesus, through His own sacrifice, becomes our family protector; our kinsmen redeemer. And even though we feel abandoned, as did Naomi and Ruth, we are never left alone. God is always with us, weaving our lives into His story. Just as Ruth and Boaz had a great grandson named David, whose descendant would be Jesus, our stories too, though they seem small and insignificant, can be used in a tremendous way in the narrative of God's work in our world.

Getting the Conversation Started

This question can be used as an ice-breaker in the beginning OR interwoven between the questions below to draw the group into the discussion.

Name a time or activity that was substantially better because you were in good company.

Scripture Study

Read: Psalm 22

- 1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?*
- 2 My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.[b]*
- 3 Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.[c]*
- 4 In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.*
- 5 To you they cried out and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.*
- 6 But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by everyone, despised by the people.*
- 7 All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.*
- 8 "He trusts in the Lord," they say,
"let the Lord rescue him.
Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him."*
- 9 Yet you brought me out of the womb;
you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast.*
- 10 From birth I was cast on you;
from my mother's womb you have been my God.*
- 11 Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.*
- 12 Many bulls surround me;
strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.*
- 13 Roaring lions that tear their prey
open their mouths wide against me.*
- 14 I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted within me.*
- 15 My mouth[d] is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.*
- 16 Dogs surround me,
a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce[e] my hands and my feet.*
- 17 All my bones are on display;
people stare and gloat over me.*
- 18 They divide my clothes among them*

and cast lots for my garment.
 19 *But you, Lord, do not be far from me.*
You are my strength; come quickly to help me.
 20 *Deliver me from the sword,*
my precious life from the power of the dogs.
 21 *Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;*
save me from the horns of the wild oxen.
 22 *I will declare your name to my people;*
in the assembly I will praise you.
 23 *You who fear the Lord, praise him!*
All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!
 24 *For he has not despised or scorned*
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help.
 25 *From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;*
before those who fear you[f] I will fulfill my vows.
 26 *The poor will eat and be satisfied;*
those who seek the Lord will praise him—
may your hearts live forever!
 27 *All the ends of the earth*
will remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,
 28 *for dominion belongs to the Lord*
and he rules over the nations.
 29 *All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;*
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.
 30 *Posterity will serve him;*
future generations will be told about the Lord.
 31 *They will proclaim his righteousness,*
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it

Getting things started: What words or phrases stick out to you in this psalm?

Observation vv1-10 Why is David suffering? (He suffers because he is out of favor with the people around him, he is being mocked and insulted. He is in "trouble" and in the midst of this, he feels that God has forsaken him.)

Interpretation/Observation vv. 3-5 & 9-10 How does David speak about God and to God in the midst of this suffering? How is he coping with this suffering? (He acknowledges God's true place in the universe: he is "enthroned" showing he is ultimately in control v 3. He recalls to mind what God has done for others in history vv.4-5. He confesses that God is the one who created him v.9 and God is the one who showed him how to trust in the beginning vv.9b&10.)

Application Do you resonate with some of the ways David is suffering? What areas resonate or how would this suffering look today? Do you connect with how David copes with suffering? Do you think it would be effective or not so effective for you or others today? Why or Why not?

Observation What requests does David make of God in this psalm? (v. 11&19 "Do not be far from me." v.19 "come quickly to help" v.20 "deliver me from the sword" v.21 "rescue me" from wild animals)

Interpretation vv.22-31 What method is David using here to cope with suffering? What do you think his strategy is? (David first says what he will do, he will affirm who God is and praise him even though he is in the midst of terrible suffering. He also affirms God's character towards those who suffer v. 24. He then imagines the future and how things are promised to be in the end v. 27-31)

Observation Read through the psalm one more time. What do you notice about the rhythm of the psalm? (He goes back and forth between emotions: despair, trust, frustration, trust, cries for help, confessions of physical pain and turmoil, more cries for help, an intention to praise God and then looking forward to the future.)

Interpretation/Observation In what ways does this psalm parallel Jesus' experience on Good Friday? (Cross ref: Matt 27:35-46 & John 19:23-24)

Application Jesus used this psalm in his own time of suffering. What do you take away from this psalm in terms of dealing with your own suffering? Does anything bring you comfort? Does anything bring you frustration?

Ministry Time:

1. Take some time to wait on God in silence. Ask if there are people in the group who are suffering right now or who are feeling God's absence. Break into groups and pray over those people. You can just listen to their suffering and frustration if they don't feel ready for prayer.
2. Take some time to pray as a group for those who are suffering in the world. Maybe a specific region will come to mind: Sudan, Ukraine, Syria or maybe closer to home, those in our own city who are homeless or victims of human trafficking or children suffering abuse. You can split into groups and pray for justice for several regions or issues. You can even use the words of the psalm as a guide for how to pray. Confess the injustices and then affirm who God is and what He will do in the future (Cross ref. Rev 21:1-5).