

“Saturday People”
Westminster Presbyterian Church
October 18, 2020

Psalm 30:7-10

Written by Rev. Dr. Pamela Patrick Cole, Delivered by Rev. Patrick Heery

Kim Patch, our Domestic Violence Liaison, and I have sat with a number of domestic violence victims. We have heard their stories of fear, and pain. We have heard how God was sometimes used (or should I say misused?) to keep them in those situations of fear and violence. There was the 18-year-old girl who was being hurt and threatened by her parent. There was the 80-year-old man who, after a lifetime, had to start all over again, with no possessions of any kind. There was the middle-aged woman, abused by her husband, who escaped to our county, and for whom we provided friendship and shelter. There was the woman whom we established in a new and safe home. There was the mother of five children, who needed help just to get to a doctor. I would tell you more of their stories, but they are private, and Auburn is small, and we can't risk giving away identifying information. So instead, I am going to share with you a sermon provided by the Presbyterians Against Domestic Violence Network. The Rev. Dr. Pamela Patrick Cole is a Presbyterian pastor in South Carolina, and this is her sermon, which I've adapted just a bit for length.

She did not often come to church on Sunday mornings. She came to my office regularly to talk during the week, but she did not often come to worship. She would quietly sneak up behind me in the halls during the work week with haunted eyes looking for something, hoping for something. After a few pleasant words, she would usually go away so that I could get on with the busyness of my day. I thought little of it.

One day, with fear in her eyes, she appeared behind me and told me she had written something for me to read. She handed me a crumpled-up piece of paper that was still wet from the sweat of her palms. “I wasn’t going to give it to you,” she mumbled, “but—well—you don’t have to read it.” She scurried away, probably afraid she had just handed her heart to me and that I was going to stomp on it. It was a poem, and it read:

*I come to find rest
I come to find freedom
I come to find peace
I come to find... to find I am scared, no—terrified.
The faces around me smile... but do not know me.
The smiles are pasted and blank with joy.
The hymns sound like noise to me.
I do not know how to make the same noise.
Is it a noise everyone knows but me?
Around me they proclaim, “I believe in blah blah blah mmm mm. Amen.”
I cannot proclaim because
I do not understand.*

*Help me.
They say, "I believe in God."
Where is God?
I come anyway.*

When I read her poem, I realized that I had not stomped on her heart; she had stomped on mine. She had come with longing for God; I had given her platitudes. She had come with an all-consuming ache; I had given her a Band-Aid. She had come to bring God to me; I had presumptuously thought I was to bring God to her.

This woman was afraid. No, afraid is not a good enough word. She was filled with terror. She had been brutally abused as a child, [and faced more abuse as an adult.] She longed for church. She longed for God. She longed for an open, loving community of faith. She came around because she longed, yet she did not find here that God for which she longed.

She did not find that God here because we all look so deceptively good on the outside. We preach the gospel with great authority, with great assurance. We say the creed as if we believe it, as if life has been neatly tied into a nice package and there is nothing left to worry about, or to hurt about. We preach the good news and smile and laugh and look so good in our Sunday best. (She, on the other hand, was too depressed even to wash her hair, much less put on her Sunday best.)

The biblical text shows us a God who is not as neatly wrapped up and packaged as we might imagine. The biblical text shows us a God who yearns, a God who aches, a God who suffers, a God who hurts, a God who dies. The biblical text shows us a Saturday kind of God, because we are at many times in our lives, a Saturday kind of people.

On Friday, Christ was crucified. On Sunday, he was resurrected. But on Saturday—Saturday—everything was more horrible than we could imagine. On Saturday, the disciples had lost their Lord. Mary had lost her son. The people had lost all hope. On Saturday, God had been crucified. On Saturday, there was darkness, and no one knew if there would be light again.

Unfortunately, in our churches, we are all too quick to run from Friday to the triumph and assurance of Sunday. We say, "It will be OK—God is with you." To a Saturday person, nothing feels further from the truth. We say to our hurting friends, "Nothing will separate you from the love of God." Nothing, in fact, feels more like a lie, to us or to them.

If we are to take the biblical witness seriously—the biblical witness as a whole—we need to take seriously every part of the God it presents. If we are to take the biblical witness seriously, we have to grapple with a Saturday kind of God—because we are, even though we may not look like it or act like it, a Saturday kind of people.

When we ignore the hurting God, the yearning God, the angry God, the aching God, we end up ignoring those in our midst—maybe all of us?—who are hurting and yearning and angry. When we ignore the God who is absent, we kick out those among us who feel God is absent in their lives. From the Psalms we hear, "Thou didst hide thy face, I was dismayed." "How long, O Lord,

will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?"

When we ignore the God who is crucified, we ignore those who are fighting tooth and nail with death in their lives. From Matthew, "From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'elahi, elahi, lemah, sevaqtani?' Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"

Walter Brueggemann told a story about a renowned teacher who lost his child in an accident. The teacher had written a lot about the pain of his loss and the agony of being forsaken by God. After a moving discussion by this teacher of the reality of gut wrenching pain in the Christian life, someone stood up and told the teacher that the death of his child was really... good. Good.

That is exactly what we are apt to do to our sisters and brothers in Christ when they are hurting. Rather than allowing them to hurt, to rage, to question, to doubt, to ache, we say, "Don't worry. God is in control." We say, "God is good."

When we give this flimsy message of hope to those who are hurting, when we give this flimsy message of hope to ourselves, we are denying the full, deep, real experience of being God's people. We are denying the full, rich, complex God revealed to us in Scripture. We are ignoring the Saturday God.

Saturday was the day on which it looked as if God were dead and that was that. Saturday was the day that no one knew. No one knew what was going to happen. Because we look back with joy upon the resurrection, it is difficult for us to remember what Saturday must have been like. Or is it?

What is it to be in Saturday?

Saturday is being told the chemo is not working and there is nothing else to try.
Saturday is finding out the baby in your womb no longer has a heartbeat as you lie on the cold, hard table in the examination room staring at a picture of a smiling baby on the ceiling.
Saturday is feeling lonely and afraid in a room full of Christian sisters and brothers.
Saturday is being told by your spouse that they do not love you anymore.
Saturday is finding out your spouse is committing adultery.
Saturday is finding out that your child has been killed in an automobile accident.
Saturday is the confusion and pain of not knowing how to forgive someone.
[Saturday is not knowing when he's going to come home angry and send you to the emergency room.]
Saturday is like... What? What is Saturday like for you?

The next time she sneaked up on me in the hall, I was ready. I said, "Wait—do not go so quickly. I read your poem. I have never written poetry myself. I have only written prose. But I have tried

to write a poem. I have tried to write a poem for you. Could I read it to you?" She nodded a silent response. I fearfully read to her my first attempt at poetry:

*Thank you for bringing the crucified God to me, the Saturday God.
I am scared of him.
He sweats blood, and that seems like it would hurt unbearably.
I would rather not sweat at all.*

*Thank you for bringing the crucified God to me, the Saturday God.
My soul longs for this God.
But will this God take me to places that I am afraid to go?
Will this God take me back into the dark places, the places that I want to go away and
never return?
Will this God make me hurt again like I hurt then?
Thank you for bringing the crucified God to me, the Saturday God.
I am confused by this God's unsmiling face.
If I do not say the creed, I do not know what to say.
Can you help me?*

Amen.