

Reflection: "Hope and Nourishment in Challenging Times "

Scripture Readings: Psalm 130:1-8, John 6:35, 41-51

2004 was a very good year for me. Same-sex marriage became legal in Ontario the year before and André and I got married in September of 2004. I was working in Ottawa at the Senate as a parliamentary reporter, and within the first few months of my new wedded bliss, committee hearings began on Bill C-38, which later became known as the Civil Marriage Act, that would entrench same-sex marriage throughout Canada. I was one of the main reporters on the committee and took the verbatim record for most of the Senate's hearings.

Now, I should say that, as a stenographer, we are trained to focus on the words rather than the content, to be impartial and commit to the integrity of the record.

But, these committee hearings were a challenge for me. I sat feet away from witnesses who were fully committed to the rejection of Bill C-38. Highly respected people from various faith traditions said that people like me were incapable of entering into a marital relationship, that we were demanding unjust recognition (because we did not fulfill the essential condition of marriage), that there was a pathological implication that would diminish those heterosexual couples who were already married, and that recognizing LGBTQ relationships as marriages would endanger not only freedom of conscience and religion, but also the quality of public and private education in the future.

That seems like a lot and it seemed like a lot to me at the time. But I captured every word and did my job to the best of my ability.

However, I wanted to cry out. In my heart and mind, I prayed for strength and patience.

I think we all experience times when we want to cry out. Whether we are going through personal or relationship problems, or we're overwhelmed with the seemingly endless stories in the news of political strife, social unrest, or the weight of injustice. These feelings can press upon us.

In times like these, I find comfort in scripture or a hymn, I find hope and nourishment for a heavy soul.

Today, we listened to Elveera read Psalm 130 and passages from John 6, that spoke to seeking solace and strength in God's word.

Psalm 130 begins with a powerful plea: "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice!" These words echo through our hearts, especially when we feel submerged in despair and uncertainty. These words are raw and honest, reflecting a profound need for divine intervention.

This cry for help is not unfamiliar to us. At times in our current political climate – or if I dive into the comment sections of online news sources – I find myself crying out for kindness, justice, equality, and peace. The words of the Psalm remind me that it is okay to acknowledge our struggles and bring them before God. In these moments of vulnerability, I like to think of the image of opening up to the transformative power of God's grace.

As we continue listening to the Psalm, we encounter a message of hope and redemption. Elveera read, "I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope." This waiting is not passive but active, filled with anticipation and trust in God's promises.

In our own lives, waiting can be challenging, especially when we are desperate for change. However, the Psalm reminds us that God's timing is perfect. As we wait, we are called to trust in God's unfailing love and abundant mercy. This trust is not easy, but it is essential for our spiritual growth and resilience. I think of being surrounded by the negativity in that committee room, waiting for healing.

The Psalm concludes with a powerful affirmation: "Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption." Here, the Psalm speaks to the community, urging us to place our collective hope in God. When we face challenges, we must support one another (and ourselves) and place our hope in God's redemptive power.

Turning to the Gospel of John, Jesus proclaims, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." These words offer profound comfort and reassurance. Jesus is not really speaking about physical sustenance but spiritual nourishment that sustains us in times of trial.

In the verses that follow, Jesus faces skepticism and opposition. The people question how he can claim to have come down from heaven. Yet, Jesus remains steadfast, emphasizing the divine source of his mission. He declares, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever."

These words take on special significance. Challenges often leave us feeling drained and disheartened. We may question where we can find the strength to continue, to face a new day, to find the energy to advocate for justice and peace. Jesus' promise of being the bread of life reminds us that our true nourishment comes from him. It is in our relationship with Christ that we find the sustenance needed to persevere.

Jesus' invitation to partake in the bread of life is inclusive and unconditional. He offers himself to all who seek him, regardless of their background or status. This message is particularly important for us as a progressive and inclusive community. We are called to embody Christ's radical hospitality, welcoming all who come seeking spiritual nourishment.

As we reflect on these Scriptures, we are reminded that our faith calls us to action. In today's Psalm we are encouraged to wait and hope in God's redemption, while in John we are challenged to find our nourishment in Christ. But what does this look like in practice, especially in challenging times?

We remain steadfast in prayer. Just as we cry out to God, we too must bring our concerns and struggles before the Lord. Prayer is a powerful tool that connects us to God's grace and strengthens our resolve.

We support one another as a community. The Psalm's call to the community to put our hope in the Lord speaks to the importance of collective faith. When I look into your faces, I see the kindness and love, and how you selflessly offer encouragement and support to those who are struggling.

We seek to embody the inclusive and unconditional love of Christ. Jesus' invitation to partake in the bread of life is extended to all. We are called to be a welcoming and inclusive community, showing love and compassion to everyone, especially those who are marginalized and oppressed or crying out, aloud or within themselves.

Returning to that same committee examining Bill C-38, that I spoke of earlier, the one that was so difficult to sit through. There was another witness who came to speak. Reverend Brian Cornelius spoke on behalf of the United Church. He came late in the day, after all the others. Brian spoke in support of Bill C-38. He used words like inclusion, diversity, mutual respect and equality. He said that same-sex marriage enhances, rather than diminishes the institution of marriage and the diversity of the nation. That all marriage between two people who love each other, heterosexual or homosexual, or however you identify yourself, should be celebrated. That uniting in love is something to be honoured. He reminded everyone in the committee room that we are all children of God and deserving of love.

This was one of those occasions when I felt the spirit.

I can tell you that the energy in the room changed when Brian spoke. The air seemed to change, as well. Hearing those words, hearing Brian, was a gift from God and an answer to my prayers. I was nourished and uplifted. My cry was calmed.

Let us remember that there is always hope and that our hope comes from God. Whatever problems we face, we are called to trust in God's unfailing love and to find our sustenance in Christ. As we wait for God's help, let us support one another, help to comfort those who may be crying out from their souls, let us embody Christ's inclusive love, and remain committed to justice and peace.

May we be beacons of hope and nourishment in our community as we reflect the transformative power of God's grace.

Amen.