

Psalm 142  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent  
“The Cross Is...”

March 22, 2020—Shepherd of the Mountains, Pinetop, AZ

INI

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today is the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent. This day is called by some people, “the pink Sunday” because of the liturgically appropriate rose-colored vestments and paraments that sometimes show up instead of the penitent purple. Historically this has been a Sunday that is a break from the somber vibe that we get from the rest of the Lenten season. The word “Laetare,” the name for this Sunday, means “rejoice.” It is a Sunday of rejoicing. In some congregations, they even break their Lenten fasting of Alleluias in worship, and songs of rejoicing are sung. The whole vibe for the day lightens up a bit.

But I’m willing to bet, not many people feel very much like rejoicing this morning. As we are unable to gather together for worship, as we are shut up in our homes, we feel isolated. We feel alone. We feel...well...not like rejoicing. After all, what is there to rejoice about when you are stuck in a cave?

Well the Apostle Paul reminds us in his letter to the Philippians: <sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

These words are meant to inspire us in the Lord. They come from Paul. Paul was isolated also. He was in his own cave of sorts, being imprisoned probably in Rome at the time when he wrote this letter.

Can you relate? I know I can. Right now with very few people coming into the church office, without being able to go out to our locally owned coffee shops, with increasing working from home during this social distancing, I know that I certainly feel alone, like I’m trapped in a cave, stuck in a prison. It’s hard to find any light in our present darkness. And when I’m usually facing darker hours, I often turn to the Psalms for comfort. Usually in them I find reason to bring back my rejoicing.

Today’s appointed psalm is Psalm 142. David is in a very real cave. And here is his prayer to the Lord.

<sup>1</sup> **With my voice I cry out to the LORD;**  
**with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD.**  
<sup>2</sup> **I pour out my complaint before him;**  
**I tell my trouble before him.**  
<sup>3</sup> **When my spirit faints within me,**  
**you know my way!**  
**In the path where I walk**  
**they have hidden a trap for me.**  
<sup>4</sup> **Look to the right and see:**  
**there is none who takes notice of me;**  
**no refuge remains to me;**  
**no one cares for my soul.**  
<sup>5</sup> **I cry to you, O LORD;**  
**I say, “You are my refuge,**  
**my portion in the land of the living.”**  
<sup>6</sup> **Attend to my cry,**  
**for I am brought very low!**  
**Deliver me from my persecutors,**  
**for they are too strong for me!**  
<sup>7</sup> **Bring me out of prison,**  
**that I may give thanks to your name!**  
**The righteous will surround me,**  
**for you will deal bountifully with me.**

Well, that backfired. There doesn’t seem to be much rejoicing here! We prefer psalms that talk of the steadfast love of the Lord, how His mercy endures forever, how He blesses those who follow Him and who delight

in His ways, how we should rejoice in the day that the Lord has made. What are we supposed to do with a psalm where the psalmist is complaining to God?

Well a little context might help. The psalm is titled **“A maskil (or a contemplative poem) of David, when he was in the cave. A prayer.”**

1<sup>st</sup> Samuel tells us how God had judged king Saul for his disobedience. A new king would be anointed, one after the Lord's own heart. The Holy Spirit rests upon David and departs from Saul. And then Saul later becomes threatened by David. He tries to kill David. So, David flees to various places to avoid Saul. And that is where we find David this morning...afraid and hiding in a cave as he writes this psalm.

Many of us find ourselves in a similar position today. The situation is certainly different, but, in a way, still similar. We are stuck in a cave. Not one of stone, but a cave of our own dwelling places as caution forces us to distance ourselves from a threat that is surrounding us. Without a microscope, we cannot see our threat. We cannot reason with our threat. No amount of toilet paper or hoarding of groceries will make the threat go away. Like David, for the time being, all we can do is hide from it.

When you're afraid, cut off is the last place you want to be. The dark of a cave like David's provided no comfort. Even the relative safety of isolation in our own homes, provides little comfort. But David, even in the midst of his fear, still trusted in the Lord. He was not alone. And neither are we.

Yes, David's psalm is a complaint because he doesn't know yet what God is going to do in this situation, but at the same time, he continues to have faith. With his complaint is a prayer. And it is a prayer of deep trust. We can find rejoicing even in this dark hour of David's life.

If you look at verses 6&7, we see a turn in the mood of the psalm. David acknowledges that he is helpless on his own. He prays for deliverance from a threat that he can't handle on his own. And verse 7 especially shows David's confidence that the Lord will deliver him. Even in the darkness of his situation and in the literal physical darkness of his cave, David sees a light shining through. The Lord has made promises. The Lord will be faithful to his servant. He *will* bring him out of this prison. And knowing this, trusting in the Lord, believing that God would see him through his present crisis, there was rejoicing on David's heart. There was a spark of joy even in the darkest place. And God remained faithful and remained with His servant David. And David came out of the cave eventually. And many more psalms were written, psalms of rejoicing because the Lord always remained faithful.

Today we have cause for rejoicing also. Sure, we rejoice that God remained faithful to David and that David got out of his cave. But more than that we rejoice that He sent the Son of David, Jesus Christ. This Son of David would come to willingly go into a different kind of cave. While the first David hid in a cave to escape his persecutors, the Son of David, Jesus Christ, would willingly go to His persecutors with the purpose of being placed in His cave.

First it was a cave of total darkness and abandonment as He hung on a cross. There was no refuge. No one was left to help Him. No one cared for Him. He was left alone. And then after He breathed His last, He was placed in the cave of the tomb.

So today we rejoice. On this special Sunday in Lent, as we continue our journey to the cross, we rejoice. Even right now as we shelter in our own sort of caves, we rejoice. Because we know that even when we can't see what God is going to do next, there is light in our cave. Even when there is fear and uncertainty, even when there is a microscopic enemy surrounding us. We rejoice because we know that in God's timing we will be delivered from our current cave. And we rejoice because we will never have to face the utter darkness of the cave that Jesus faced. Because His cave couldn't hold Him. Rising from the dead, He left His cave, not looking over His shoulder to see if His enemies were still there, but boldly and victoriously, having conquered them, and proving His promises to us are true.

He remains faithful to His people. In His timing He will deliver us from this current cave. So while we are waiting to see what God is going to do next, we rejoice. We pray without ceasing, for our leaders, for our communities, for our healthcare providers, for our families, and for ourselves. We join David in a prayer of deep trust. I don't know what You are doing Lord. I'm stuck in a cave. I don't know when I'm going to get out. But I know You are with me. And I know You will deliver me. And so I rejoice in You. Because I know that because of your cross and your empty tomb, in Your timing we will be delivered forever. You have given me hope for now and for eternity. So even in this deep season of Lententide I sing to You my alleluia. Amen.