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Pentecost 7 – Psalm 130 – He Himself Will Redeem Israel from All their Sins

7/15-19/20 – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, WI

It sounded like a great idea at first. Let's get one more hunting trip in before the weather gets too cold. Let's find some land out in the middle of nowhere, somewhere where we can really spread out, where we won't run into anybody else, where we can just enjoy nature. Well there wasn't much that was enjoyable about this. See, as the day went on, you got separated from your group because you wanted to check out your own trails and your own hotspots. You thought you would scout out some really great vantage points and just have some time to yourself, and once you were satisfied with what you saw, you turned around to go back to camp. But the problem was you hadn't left yourself a string. You hadn't left yourself a trail of crumbs. And going the other way, nothing looked the same. You had no idea where you were, you had no idea how to get where you wanted to go, and you knew as far out as you were, you had no one to help. You never thought it would happen to you, but as the night fell, the wind picked up, and you started to get cold and dehydrated, you realize you're in real trouble, because getting lost in the woods during the day is one thing. Getting lost in the woods at night is something else entirely, and the terrifying thought enters your mind that this might be a life or death situation. This far out, you don't know what's out there for you to trip on, step into and hurt yourself, *fall* into or over, or even possibly make you its next meal. You keep moving, you call out, but nothing seems to help. So with a long, restless night ahead of you, you hit your knees and pray something probably sort of like our psalmist for today: *“Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.”*

Now I may not be a storyteller like Pastor Meier, but I think there are some similarities between this hunter's story and ours. Only for us, it's not a hunting trip. It's a sinful life in a sinful world. And we're not lost in nature. But *by* nature, we are lost in sin, in spiritual darkness, and there's no finding our way out. In fact, we're in a hole that we ourselves dug, and it's so deep that all we can do is call for help. We're not big enough, not smart enough, not strong enough to escape.

But what we ourselves could not accomplish, our God himself could and did.

As the psalmist says, *“If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.”* The government keeps criminal records, but not our God. And that's a very good thing, because whether you have a criminal record on file down at the police station or not, as children of God, you don't in his heavenly courtroom. Even the laundry list of sins each of us knows we've committed – breaking every one of the Ten Commandments and then some, repeatedly, in thought, word, and action – those are things that by God's grace might stay in our minds and have to be dealt with in this world, but never will in God's. For Christ's sake, our record of sins has been blotted out and stamped with that amazing declaration, *“JUSTIFIED, NOT GUILTY.”* That shame and guilt you feel because of the things you've done and the hurt you've caused others – Christ took it away, took it to the cross and crucified it, and brought back in its place forgiveness and peace and rest for your souls now and forevermore. Those are gifts that only the LORD with all capital letters, the eternal God of free and faithful grace who always keeps his promises, can give his people. And for that, he deserves to be feared and revered.

Now if you were blessed to have parents who cared about godly discipline, then you can understand what it means for us to “fear” God. It doesn't so much mean to dread God or be afraid of God as it does to have the highest respect for him. This kind of godly fear is like the “fear” you had for your parents growing up. You knew you didn't cross them. You didn't mock them or mess with them or take advantage of them. You revered them and respected their authority, because you knew there would be consequences if you didn't. You knew that more than anything your parents loved you, wanted what was best for you, and had your best interests in mind. But they weren't afraid to punish you if you didn't give them the honor they deserved. Well, that's also the kind of relationship that our God wants us to have with him. He loves us – enough even to send his one and only Son into this world to save us from our sins. He wants what's best for us – so much so that he promises that he makes all things work out for the good of those who love him. And he certainly has our best interests in mind, because

everything that happens in this world serves his purpose of finally bringing us home to heaven one day. Since he has done so many great things for us, he deserves our respect, he's more than earned our reverence, and there's no one else who's as worthy of our reliance.

And so put yourself back in the shoes of that hunter lost in those woods. You don't know where you are or where to go. You're lost and disoriented and helpless, and it's only getting worse as the sun creeps below the horizon. Right then you're probably feeling kind of like the psalmist again: "*I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.*" If I'm waiting on the side of the road with car trouble, I'm confessing that I need help for a problem I can't fix. If I'm waiting for someone else to come and help me move something big and heavy, I'm admitting that I can't do it for myself. And if I'm waiting for the LORD, I'm saying that I need him to help my soul have hope – real, substantive, lasting hope – for something so much better than what I can see right now.

As we go through this dark world, sometimes we can feel like watchmen waiting for the morning. Back in Bible times, watchmen were charged with the safety of their city. At night time they would stay on the city wall or in a tower and scan the horizon for any signs of approaching danger. It was a hard, stressful, pressure-packed job that in a very real way put many lives in their hands. As they neared the end of another long, restless night, their eyes would ache from constantly searching the darkness and their nerves would be fried from hearing all the strange sounds and considering all the sinister possibilities. Well, everything we have to deal with in this world can make us like that too. Sickness, injuries, threats, danger, social unrest, suffering, death – all of them make us long for the light of hope and spiritual rest that only our God can give. And thankfully he is more than willing to give it with special blessings that are even greater than the morning's dawn – as great as that is for a hunter lost in the woods or a watchman waiting for the morning – because these blessings are spiritual, they're eternal, and for Christ's sake, they can never be taken away from us. It's just like the old church father Augustine once said: "*You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.*"

And it's that kind of confidence that the psalmist voices for us: "*O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.*" Our LORD's love for us is unfailing. That means even when we're lost, he's searching for us. When we're in a hole, he's reaching down for us. When we're running away, he's running after us. As much as we might want to *leave*, he *loves* us more. Our sin may be great, but his redemption is greater. See, because of our sins, God in his Word says that we sold ourselves as slaves to the devil. We were under his power with no way to get out. But Jesus paid our ransom price with his own blood. He bought us back for himself, set us free from sin and from the power of the devil, and made us God's own children now. He gave us true spiritual and eternal rest because he took the burden of our guilt upon himself and reinvigorates us by the power of his Word and the promise of everlasting paradise at home in heaven with him. It was the heart of God's Old Testament promise to his people when the psalmist said, "*He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins;*" well, through the perfect New Testament life, death, and resurrection of our Lord, the God-man Jesus Christ, we can gladly change that to "*He himself has redeemed Israel from all their sins,*" because our God's love for us was so great that he himself plunged into the deepest depths of our world, of our sin, in order to take all that upon himself and raise us back up with him to the highest heights of eternal salvation in heaven.

So now go once more to that hunter, scared, alone, and unsure of what he's going to do or how he's even going to make it. As the night gets darker, so also his hope gets dimmer. Until he sees the light and hears the call. It's his father, the one person on that hunting trip that refused to give up searching until he had scoured every inch of those woods and found his son. It's that kind of all-go, no-quit, never-give-up love that your heavenly Father has for you, that he was even willing to search for you and find you, no matter where this dark world might try to hide you. He will never give up on you, he loves you more than you know, he'll stop at nothing to bring you home one day, and dear Christians, know that *that* is why he himself has redeemed Israel, has redeemed *you* from all your sins. Amen.