

Introduction:

My brothers and sisters, I wrote one of the hardest emails I've ever had to write on Thursday afternoon. I admit it, I had to turn on autopilot as I wrote it. In fact, for most of Thursday, that is what I had to do. I had to let muscle memory take over. Andrew read to me an email from one of our shepherds regarding the passing of our sister Elizabeth Welch and from that moment on, I basically had to trust my preacher instincts to do what work was left to do for the rest of the day. Andrew and I decided to go over to the Welches' home. But honestly, I didn't know what to say or what to do. I believe Andrew felt in the same boat. We knew to sit there in mourning. We knew to offer prayers. But I'm just going to be honest with you, at least for my part, my prayer felt empty. I think I said the right kinds of words. I think I prayed the right kinds of things. But honestly, my soul refused to be comforted. And frankly, I can't imagine the soul of my brethren in that house were very comforted. Even now as I write this sermon (and I imagine even when I preach it), comfort is hard to come by. In fact, I admit to you that in moments like these I usually revert to 12-year-old Edwin. I don't want to, but it happens. I spent so many years and went through so many events repeating the same approach to tragedy that I run back to it without even thinking. At 12, when my own mother died, I didn't know how to mourn and grieve. There was no comfort anywhere. No one knew what to say to me. And frankly, nobody said much that was helpful. So, rather than seeking comfort, I simply shut it all off. If emotion would be that painful, then better not to feel. As Simon and Garfunkel opined, "I am a rock. I am an island. And a rock feels no pain. And an island never cries." But there is no comfort there either. There is only isolation. There is only loneliness. And that human loneliness begins to take on the form of divine loneliness, divine abandonment. In fact, the enemy will wrap his tentacles through that and twist it to seem that the Lord whose very name means grace and mercy, whose very name means steadfast love and faithfulness abounds (**Exodus 34:5-8**), has abandoned us. It seems His steadfast love has ceased, His faithfulness has ended, His promises have failed, His grace and compassion have come to an end. There will never be another favorable day.

So, on Friday I searched for a psalm. I believed that if anything could help right now, it would surely be found in a psalm. It took me halfway through the psalms before I found it. But there it was. **Psalms 77**. From now, I will call it "When My Soul Refuses to be Comforted." Will you read it with me?

Discussion:

- I. Life happened to the psalmists too.
 - A. Can you just let the first half of this psalm wash over you? Just soak in it for a few moments.
 - B. He is seeking God, but God is seemingly nowhere to be found. He longs for comfort, but his soul refuses it. When he is able to direct his mind back to God, he moans. When he tries to focus his meditation on God, rather than being lifted up on wings like eagles, he faints.
 - C. He can't sleep. He tries to make a diligent search in his own mind for something to help. He tries to think of a song to sing that might make a difference. But he keeps returning to painful questions. Will the Lord spurn forever? Will He never look on me with favor again? The steadfast love I used to sing about, is it gone? Has it finally collapsed? Are His promises done? Has He forgotten grace? Has he finally gotten so angry with me that He has lost all compassion?
 - D. This is a psalm. This is Scripture. This is inspired. Like every other Scripture you read, this is God-breathed. Life happened to psalmists too.
- II. Two bits of advice.
 - A. **Psalms 77:1**—Cry aloud to God. Don't stop.
 1. When life happens to you like it does to the psalmist, I know comfort is hard to come by. The words of your friends fail. Some of them will even admit they have no idea what to say. I know you want each moment to be your last, but then there is another moment. You wonder how you can endure such mental, emotional, and psychological anguish.
 2. I know you've already prayed. Others have prayed with you. You've cried. You've cried until you thought you were cried out and then you cried some more. You've prayed through the tears. And there is part of you that is saying, "If God hasn't done anything about this yet, why bother?"

3. Look, I get it. There is no comfort. In fact, even in God there seems like there is no comfort. He hasn't done anything to comfort you yet in response to your prayers, why would He start with the next prayer? But, please, see the psalmist's example. The whole thing starts, "I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me. In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted." The psalmist's soul was finding no comfort, but he refused to stop crying aloud to God. Please, don't stop praying. Don't stop seeking God. He may not be doing anything yet, but He hears. He hears.

B. **Psalm 77:11-20**—Remember the deeds of the Lord, especially the parting of the Red Sea

1. "But I just can't find the motivation," you say. "I'm cried out. I'm prayed out." The psalmist found his motivation in a weird place. I admit it, I read this psalm looking for hope and help this weekend and thought I'd hit a dead end. I mean, I get it. God is powerful. He has done great things. But the first half of this psalm is how God isn't acting on the psalmist's behalf and the second is a reminder of the parting of the Red Sea. What? I mean if that isn't a non sequitur, I don't know what is. At first, that sounded to me like the people who just spout off "Jesus is the answer," but as you talk to them it is painfully obvious they don't even know what the question is. What is this about?
2. And then it hit me. What does the Red Sea represent? It represents a moment in Israel's history when God Himself led them right in between the devil and the deep Red Sea. They were boxed in (or rather triangled in). On one side of them was an impassable wilderness, a mountain terrain that they could never lead their children and flocks through. On another side was Pharaoh's army, bearing down on them, ready to overrun and destroy them. On the third side, the Red Sea. And the people cried out to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?"
3. Picture this. They had watched as God ravaged Egypt. They had watched as God had spared them from the plagues. They had experienced God's blessing as they plundered the wealth of Egypt. They had days, even months, of seeing in powerful ways that God was on their side. He was delivering them. He was doing what He promised. And then the night came when Pharaoh gave them their freedom. YES!!! It is the favorable day of the Lord! It is the day of salvation! What joy! But from that mountaintop high, they have now plunged into the valley of the shadow of death. There is no hope. The favorable day of the Lord has clearly ended. There is no salvation. Their spirit faints. They think of God and they moan. It looks like God got tired of grace with that last plague. And now, we will die.
4. I know we are aware of what comes next. But let's hang out here for just a few moments. Because, honestly, that is where many of us are hanging out right now. We are smack in the middle of the devil's triangle. On the one side, circumstances are stacked against us. The pain is impassable. On the other side, sin beckons us to abandon the Lord. On the third side, Satan whispers, "Why not? Look at where the Lord has led you. Look at what He hasn't done for you." And while we can't see a possible way out, perhaps we can remember another day when there was no possible way out, no possible way through, no possible way God could deliver. But He did!
5. He parted the sea and He had Moses and Aaron lead Israel through like a flock. And the waters came crashing down on the Egyptian army.
6. But notice these words in **Psalm 77**. "Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen" (ESV). In Satan's triangle, it was impossible to see the Lord's path. I get it, I have no idea where the Lord's path is in the face of a tragedy like we have faced. I have no idea where to even look for the Lord's footprints, I can't even find them in the sand. In fact, it may be that His path is right through the place that seems impossible. But I know this. His path is there. And if I just keep crying out to Him, if I just keep hanging on to Him, He hears. I don't know when He will part the sea. It may not be today. It may not be tomorrow. It may not be this week, this month, or even this year. But He will. Keep hanging on. Keep crying out.

III. We have it better than the psalmist.

- A. Can I share with you that we actually have it better than the psalmist? In the moment when his soul refused to be comforted, when there was little hope, little help, little strength, and little faith, he looked through all of human history to find something to grab hold of. The best he could find was the crossing of the Red Sea. And, no doubt, that was significant. But, my brothers and sisters, we have something better.
- B. We have Jesus.
- C. We have Jesus on the cross.
- D. We have Jesus crying out, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" Talk about a moment when it seems that all is lost—when it seems there is no hope, there is no help, there is no comfort. And then the unthinkable.

He dies. And the women watch as He is removed from the cross and then dumped in a cave as a rock is rolled in place over the tomb. And it is Saturday. The disciples are huddled together in a room for fear. What if they are next? What if Jesus's death is not enough? What if the Romans or the Jews decide to come after Jesus's team of ambassadors? We thought He was the Messiah. We thought He was the King. We thought He had the Words of Life. And now He is dead. And it is Saturday and there is no comfort to be found anywhere. And we are stuck again in the devil's triangle.

- E. I get it. It is Saturday for many of us right now. And the footsteps of the Lord are hard to find. His way through this mess is unknown. But, my brothers and sisters, as so many have said before me, Sunday is coming. Once again, the Lord is in the earthquake. It trembles and shake the earth. It rolls the stone aside. And Jesus is alive. The path of God was through the grave. His way was unknown, His footsteps were unseen. But the Lord has made a way. Hang on to Him! Keep crying aloud! Don't let go.

Conclusion:

For many of us right now, it is Saturday. And our souls refuse to be comforted. Even the hope of Sunday may be little comfort when you are living in Saturday. But my hope is that we will all hang on, because many have lived in Saturday before us, and Sunday always follows. It always comes. Sunday's coming. And though there may be little comfort along the way, if we hang on to the Lord, He will lead us to Sunday. I promise you. It will be worth it.