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## Trusting in God: Doing and Waiting *Psalm 37*

I work half time for Shalom Mennonite Church, so instead of preaching every Sunday, I preach on the first and third Sundays of the month. And to prepare for preaching, I meet with a group of people every Wednesday night to study the scripture that I'm going to preach on. So for the last two weeks, our Bible study has been reading this section of Psalm 37.

During our Bible study this week, it became very clear that we have a problem with fretting. Someone in the group said, "Well, if I'm not supposed to fret, that means I need to go find a deserted island and live there. Because that's the only way I'm not going to fret."

That might sound funny. But it's also revealing. Our *fretting*, and our anxiety about the state of the world—and not just about "the world out there," but our *own* communities—it says something about our situation as humans—we *worry* about things; and we want the *right* things to happen.

This Psalm—and *a lot* of the psalms—address this very *common* scenario: people are being manipulated, abused, oppressed and coerced by other people. And the people who are the *most* forceful, the people who have the most money, and the people who are willing to act *unjustly*, they're the ones who seem to be *prospering*. They're the ones who are *running* things. And that's not right!

The writer of this psalm is addressing this exact situation—people with power are abusing it, and taking advantage of others. It sounds like they might be controlling the land, or parts of it. And the psalmist is worried about what's going to happen. Where are the faithful, righteous people going to live?

It sounds shockingly familiar, doesn't it? How many articles have you seen posted on Facebook about the wickedness of multinational corporations, that go into poorer countries, take over land, and exploit the natural resources? How many of you have seen the video of the CEO of Nestle saying that *water* should *not* be considered a human right? It should be like everything else in the Western world—privatized. Somebody, please, write a Psalm about this.

These are the things *I* fret about. I fret about the chemicals in plastic, and about the destruction of the environment; I fret about *privatized prisons*. About our country sending drones to other countries, and bombing *hospitals*. About people being marginalized and silenced within our own small denomination. I would guess we all fret about these things; and *I* get *angry*. And part of me yearns to see "those unjust people" get what's coming to them. I would secretly *celebrate* if something bad happened to the leader of the National Rifle Association. Maybe even if someone took it into their *own* hands to make this happen. Because somebody *has* to do *something*. And you don't bring a knife to a gun fight and expect to win.

But what is the *Psalmist's* advice? *Trust in God, and do good. Do good, and wait for the LORD.*

That's very hard, isn't it? In the face of evil, or wickedness, we're supposed to do *good*. *And...wait. Wait patiently for God.*

This Psalm offers a balanced conception of *faithfulness*. Or maybe, it reminds us to be faithful to God. It reminds us to trust God. The psalm doesn't say, "Solve the world's problems." It says, "Do good, and *wait*." Which puts most of the responsibility on God. And this is what trusting God means, doesn't it? Trusting that *God* is good, that God *is* faithful, and that the fate of the world doesn't rest on *our* shoulders.

Now, the Psalmist does tell us that we *need to do good*. *Acting* on behalf of righteousness is what we're called to do. But it's not *all* we're called to do. We're also called to be *still* before God. *Be still, and wait patiently*. So we're called to *do good*, and also to *be still*.

It's not an easy balance, is it? We all have different personalities. Some of us are more comfortable *doing*, and being busy. Others of us are more comfortable being still, and waiting, and contemplating. But both of these attitudes are *essential*. Doing and waiting. It's a constant cycle. It's the pattern of a faithful life.

I would guess many of us are comfortable in the sphere of activism. It's the sphere of working for justice and righteousness in very *tangible* and pragmatic ways. But we need to be reminded of the importance of being *still* before God, and waiting. Waiting, of course, for the fulfillment of Jesus's promise to return and set all things right. But also, waiting for *how* and *where* God calls us to do good. Because without God's guidance—without waiting for the leading of the Holy Spirit—we can stretch ourselves thin; we can try to “run” the kingdom of God on our own willpower. And not only does this not *work*, not only is it unsustainable, but it's not *good* for us.

So what does waiting for God look like? It looks like worshipping together on Sunday mornings. It means *praying* together—voicing our yearnings and our anxieties—it means saying *out loud* the things that make us fret. And then, focusing our attention—focusing our minds and our spirits—on God's voice. And a lot of the time, this means *silencing* our minds.

Hearing God takes *time* and attention. Contemplation and prayer often don't seem very effective. Our temptation is to jump up and *act; do good*. But the Holy Spirit is *wiser* than we are. The Holy Spirit can guide our minds to places and people that we might normally overlook, or don't think much about. The Holy Spirit gives us insight that we don't have on our own. And it takes patience; it takes deliberate stillness before God, and *waiting*.

There are two sections in this Psalm that caught my attention; they caught my attention because they model an important part of trusting God as a *community*. In verse 25 and 26, and then again in 35 and 36, the writer starts talking in the first person. The writer says, “*I have been young, now I'm old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, or their children begging for bread. They are always giving liberally, their children are a blessing.*” And then in v 35: “*I have seen the wicked oppressing, but then I passed by again, and they were gone.*”

Now, I know some of us *have* seen the children of the righteous begging for bread. But what's important, I think, is that the Psalmist testifies to his or her *personal experience*. She says, “Listen, this is how *I've seen* the faithfulness of God. This is how *I've experienced* God's faithfulness.”

We *need* these testimonies. These are the stories that *strengthen* our trust in God. They give us an *alternative* way of seeing the world. And if we don't share these stories, if we don't bring attention to them, then we start to believe the dominant narrative—that *we* are running things, and that to get what we want—whether that's justice and righteous, or something else—that it's primarily *our* job to achieve these things. And if we think *we* are the saviors of the world, then the fretting and anxiety take over. And when we act out of these impulses, we're acting out of fear. And this is not what *God* wants.

I encourage us all to remember these words from the Psalmist: “In the face of wickedness, trust in the *LORD*, and *do good*. And at the same time, *be still* before the *LORD*, and wait patiently. Because God *is* faithful, and we can trust in the ultimate power and authority of God's *love*. Amen.