



I Have Calmed My Soul

TEXT
Psalm 131

March 29, 2020 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

I'll never forget how quickly my tears came.

I was at summer camp and homesick. Awful! I didn't cry, not during the day, at least not until Thursday. That was Parents' Day. And on Parents' Day, my mom came. I saw her step out of our little VW bug, and that's when the floodgates opened. My little childhood "self" burst into tears — not because something was bad, but because finally things felt like they might be OK. Camp was still camp. But I needed my mother. I was too old to still sit in her lap, but she hugged me and told me it would be all right. I trusted that.

I can't read this psalm without thinking about that moment. This is one of those psalms that just had to be written by a woman, a mother who knows the feeling of a child in her lap, perhaps scared there by thunder or a skinned knee ... who in a moment is calmed and quieted. What happens there? The thunder still rumbles, and the knee still stings. But it's different now. When we trust the love that makes sense of our world, the scary things are not as scary.

When we are adults, we need to remember that, and remember

the holy love that makes sense of our world.

It's been a scary week. There is only one news story on everyone's heart, as the United States has become the country with more coronavirus cases than any country in the world. And for us, in a matter of a few weeks, it has moved from being a story about other places to a story that lies right here. Like many of you, I pray for those who are sick, and some of them, I know their names.

We have completely changed the way we are living today: shelter in place; empty sanctuaries. Parents of young children became overnight schoolteachers, with children going to school at home. People in the hospital are not allowed to have family visit them.

It's enough to wish we could crawl into God's maternal lap and be comforted.

That's what the Psalmist says. "I have calmed and quieted my soul ... my soul is like the weaned child that is with me."

I'm struck by the statement — not *my soul is calmed and quieted*, but *I have calmed and quieted my soul*. I have needed my own soul quieted a few times recently. But I don't always feel

like I have the power to calm and quiet my soul.

But this psalm does give me some insight.

You see, when things go wrong, when trouble comes, when thunder booms, it has a power. The power of disease, or storm, or injury, or fear, the power is to hold our attention captive. It is a deceptive power, because it can cause us to believe the whole world or my whole life is defined by what is going wrong. That's why the tears came to a little 7-year-old boy at camp, because for a few days, he told himself he was alone in this world. He believed he was abandoned or forgotten, might not ever be at home again. But then mom shows up and he remembers that there is another story. It's a story of love, a story of belonging, a story of being claimed, and that's the story that is true. And just remembering that can bring calm.

It's not magic, but we do have the power to choose the story in which we live, even now. Because today is not really a day that is defined by a virus; it is a day defined by love.

The real story is that armies of healthcare workers are battling with all they have to save lives of people they have never

met. And armies of grocery store employees are showing up to make sure there's food for you, even though the person in front of you looks like they are buying food for their whole neighborhood.

And millions of ordinary people are loving their neighbor, even when loving your neighbor means staying away from them.

And you know this: At this font, we practice baptism. At this font, we tell our story. There is a holy love, like a parental lap, that claims and calms and refuses to let go of us. That's our story. We need to remember, this is the story in which we live. This font declares the love that makes sense of our lives.

When the thunder claps or our knees are skinned, when our hearts are broken, when our fears wake us in the night, that is the time to remember that the entire story of scripture and the witness of the church is that God loves you. Choose that story.

Crawl up into the lap of that truth, and it will bring calm and quiet, some peace.

I called my mom yesterday. Just over 30 years ago, she suffered a pretty bad stroke that meant she couldn't work anymore and couldn't remember very many words. If she wants a banana, she might end up asking for a toothbrush, or she might just say "thing." It's led to some challenging conversations over the years, trying to interpret the message in the midst of the muddle. She hasn't called me by name in 30 years; she just says, "Hey, love."

One word she has never lost is *fine*.

"Mom, how are you?"

"I'm fine." To be locked up inside yourself like that for decades would make most folks bitter, but I watch her with amazement that she greets not every day, but way more days than not, content, calmed, quieted.

"I'm fine," she says.

She taught me about that when I was a little guy in short pants, at summer camp.

She's taught me about that in a whole different way over the past 30 years. She didn't write this psalm, but she has lived it.

She has calmed and quieted her soul, and I know it is because she trusts that the God who made her and made all will bring her to ultimate good.

In these days, remember, this is our story.

God breathed you into life, and God will watch over you.

Don't let the power of pain and fear consume you.

Remember who you are: You are the child of a God of holy love that will never let you go.

On the days we can remember that, on the days we can trust that, no matter what else goes on, we will be fine.

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.