

A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church
By Chris Fillingham
“A New Set of Eyes”
3rd in the series *The Spirituality of the Psalms*
inspired by Brueggemann
Psalms 30
August 27, 2017

Dave is dead on the floor, next to a puddle of water. How did he die?

If you know this one, don't say!

It's the kind of riddle I've used on those long van trips to summer camp with our teenagers.

Dave is dead on the floor, next to a puddle of water. How did he die? ***That's the question, but if you know, don't tell!***

Some of you know how this works. You can only ask “yes” and “no” questions to try to get clues to what is going on here. The goal is to take what you know and figure out the story...

So, they'll ask,

Was he stabbed? No

Was he murdered? No

Was it a heart attack? No

Was it an accident? Yes.

Did Dave slip and fall on the ice? No.

On and on the questions come, as you try to put this fuzzy picture into focus.

It's really fun to be the one answering the questions too... because it's obvious to you. You can see the whole picture in your mind. You know what happened. And it's simple. But no one else can see it.

In fact, they likely have all kinds of assumptions... that are misleading them.

But they don't know it. They don't even recognize the assumptions they are making.

That's how our minds work. ***It's true for all of us.*** We have a certain framework about how things are... a picture in our mind... that orders our lives... and most of the time, we can't actually “see” anything other than those assumptions.

So, after awhile, the teenagers will get stuck. They've asked every question they can think of...

Was Dave poisoned? No

Did Dave drown? No

Did Dave have a sickness he didn't know about? No

Every question they can think of... but still... it doesn't add up.

They are starting with the wrong assumptions... the wrong picture... but they can't figure out what they are missing.

And so, you have to give them a little clue.
A nudge in the right direction.

“Ask some more questions about who Dave is...”

So they ask:

“Was Dave an accountant?” “No”

“Was Dave a police officer?” “No”

On and on they go... and they still aren’t headed in the right direction... Until finally someone asks a different kind of question “***Wait, is Dave a human?***” ***No!***

And that opens a new can of worms. It shatters the picture they had going because all this time they were picturing someone like their dad, or their uncle, or their math teacher in his slacks and button up shirt dead on the floor.

But now there is a whole new world of possibilities opened up.
Dave is dead on the floor, next to a puddle of water... but Dave isn’t a man.

And their imagination shifts.
Their view of this reality changes.
New possibilities open up.

And before too long, someone gets it, “Is Dave a fish?” Yep.
And the whole van groans.

“Did Dave’s fish bowl get knocked over?” Yep.

It is so simple. So obvious... now that they see it.
In fact, they can’t believe it took them this long.

Because once you’ve seen something new... you cannot un-see it. It changes everything. It’s like getting a whole new set of eyes.

And that’s true of more than just riddles. How you see reality fixes certain assumptions in your mind about your world. And that is true for every one of us.

You have a picture about God,
and a picture about our world,
and a picture about your life... and it’s hard to see something that doesn’t already fit into that picture.

That’s why Republicans and Democrats fight more than they cooperate. They have different pictures they are working from.

It’s why rural communities and urban communities have different ordinances and values. They have different pictures they are working from.

It may be part of why you are always clashing with one of your co-workers. You have different pictures of reality you're dealing with.

They think Dave is dead because something malicious happened.
You're convinced Dave is dead because of his own carelessness.

But when you see ***something new***... an entirely different ***way of being*** opens up to you. Dave is a fish! And the story changes, doesn't it?

And ***once you see... you cannot un-see it***. You're changed. And sometimes it changes much more than your perspective. Sometimes that "seeing" changes your life. ***Once you see... you cannot un-see.***

This is the third part of the pattern we see happening in the psalms. It's the third movement that happens in the phases of our spirituality we've been talking about this month.

There are the psalms of orientation, we talked about 2 weeks ago, that give us parts of the picture.

And then the psalms of disorientation we explored last week, where the picture doesn't make sense – or we're stuck in the riddle...

And if our souls will keep wrestling long enough... it will take us out of the chaos into a new orientation...

a new way of seeing our lives...

a new way of living and being in our world.

The seasons of disorientation lead us toward a "new set of eyes."

The psalms of new orientation.

This is what we hear happening in Psalm 30 that I read earlier. There is movement in this psalm. Listen again for it:

***"O Lord my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have healed me.
O Lord, you brought up my soul from Sheol,
restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit."***

There is movement in this psalm. She's been to hell and back... and still living to tell the story.

And her story is different from the psalms of orientation.

It's not a story about a divinely ordered world... where God is watching over everything and ordering all things.

Her story is about going through the pits of hell... and finding life on the other side.

"Weeping may linger for the night..." she says. It may hold on a long time. That pain and broken heart of yours... ***it may linger.***

"But joy comes with the morning!" In other words, as final as that night may feel... it's not the end. There is a new morning. There will be a **Dayspring**... and in that daybreak there is joy.

But there's more in this psalm... than just hope for the other side. Something happens to her in that dark night.

She starts to see what she didn't see before... and it fundamentally changes her. It's subtle, the way poetry always is, but you hear it in verses 6-7:

"I said in my prosperity, 'I shall never be moved.'"

"By your favor, O Lord, You had established me as a strong mountain."

In other words, she was full of confidence. She was prosperous. Accomplished. On top of her game. "I shall never be moved," she said.

It's the kind of rugged independence we tend to celebrate. Strong. Self-made. Her own person.

The best image she has was being like a "strong mountain." That's how she saw her life. She was on top of the world.

She was taking care of her family.

Doing the parenting thing with gusto.

Prosperous in her job.

Successful. Recognized.

Doing her religious duty. She was a strong mountain... and what does a strong mountain need? Well... nothing. No one.

And that's kind of the point, right?

There's some security in that, right?

If you can work hard enough, or achieve enough, or do enough to be "a strong mountain..." then you don't have to worry about things falling apart, because **you** know how to handle things. **You** are holding them together.

But then something happened... in two little phrases... there at the end of verse 7. "You hid your face," she says. "I... was dismayed"

It all crumbled. God's face was hidden. That's what happens in the disorientation. And her world starts to fall apart.

All that self-confidence, self-importance, self-reliance...
began to crumble.

And she starts to see what she couldn't see before.

All that she'd worked so hard to do.

All that she'd worked so hard to be.

All that she'd thought she had accomplished.

All that she thought she could handle...
She was not strong enough...
It wasn't enough after all.

And she begins to see...that all of it...
was a gift. All of it was flowing to her from God.

It never was hers to begin with.
Her accomplishments.
Her abilities.
Her life itself? It was all... a gift...

And when God's face is hidden... in the darkness... she sees that, in a way she
couldn't see it before.
She sees how frail and fragile she is...
How frail and fragile all of it is.

And in that awareness she comes to recognize what her life is really about.

Because when you see ***something new***... an entirely different way of being opens up
to you. Dave is a fish! And the story changes, doesn't it? The whole picture changes.

Last week, I talked about how the season of disorientation is like an eclipse of the
soul. Afterword, Anne Allgood's husband, who is a scientist, came up to me and shared
some really insightful things about that connection for me.

He said that even as the eclipse is a darkening... it's also a revealing.
Scientists can see and learn things about the universe that they cannot see except
during the full eclipse. When the brightness of the sun is covered... they can see into the
universe beyond it.
That's fascinating, isn't it?

In fact, in the early 20th century there was this German scientist who was starting to
upset the very laws of physics. Three hundred years earlier, Isaac Newton had laid out the
laws of physics that everyone knew governed our universe.

And for 300 years it was quite clear. It was widely confirmed and agreed upon.
Newtonian physics not only explained our universe, it shaped our reasoning... how we
think and perceive our world.

But along comes this nobody German scientist... some guy named Einstein...
suggesting that the world doesn't work like Newton said. And he develops the Theory of
Relativity.

He was a laughing stock... in the science world... until three years later... when there
was a total solar eclipse... and Einstein's Theory of Relativity was proven.

It completely reshaped the direction of science. We have a fundamentally new idea about how the world works.... because in the darkness... we saw something we couldn't see before: "Dave is a fish. And the whole universe shifts."

This is what can happen... even in the eclipse of the soul. Your disorientation isn't an end in itself... If you will keep looking for God in it... you will see what you couldn't see before.

And once you see it... you cannot un-see your life this way...

And so the psalmist says... **"You hid your face. I was dismayed. I cried out to the Lord... What good is it if I die? Will the dust praise you? Will the dust tell of your faithfulness? Hear O Lord, and be gracious to me!"**

She sees that maybe life hasn't been about being a strong mountain, unmovable and prosperous.

Maybe her life isn't about her at all... it is all God's.

"Will the dust tell of your faithfulness? Will the dust praise you?"

In those questions... she's seeing something new about her life.

There's a different purpose. A different meaning. A different story.

There is a different center to her life, a center oriented around God.

She's developing a new set of eyes.

So the psalm ends in soulful praise of God.

In deep gratitude.

It's not the praise of the psalms of orientation.... where we praise God for being the Creator. It's not going back to where she was before. Because you cannot go back. Once you see, you cannot un-see.

The psalms of new orientation move into a spirituality of deep wonder, and gratitude, and trust... a kind of surrender that comes when you learn to stop trying so hard... and be present to the gift of your life... and the giver of your life...

It's the difference between Newtonian Physics and Einstein's Theory of Relativity. Which might be described as the difference between absolute formulas that still hold true most of the time... and wonder and humility that carries you far beyond them.

Which takes us back to what I've been trying to say all along.

We haven't stopped teaching Newtonian Physics.

Think about that.

They are still important... still a helpful beginning.

We didn't throw them out...

but they aren't the fullest picture.

I hope you'll hear that. It's key for us as a church. There are foundations we have to keep teaching even if they aren't the fullest picture.

We still need ***all the psalms... all the phases of spirituality.***

All of it needs to be nurtured and allowed in the church.

All of it is essential:

There is no "new orientation" without first having a foundational orientation.
We need to start with a foundation.

But we also can't stay there. We need the darkness of the eclipse and the movement into new orientation.

And then to remember the new orientation itself... isn't the end of the journey.

And it's not linear. You don't arrive.

So today you can see that Dave is a fish... but how exactly did that fish bowl get knocked over anyway?

There is movement.

There are questions.

There is life... and death...

weeping that lingers in the night...

and joy that comes in the morning.

All of it is needed.

And All of it is gift.

Amen.

Reflection:

"I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you..."

~Ephesians 1:17-18