

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost. 12 August 2018. Out of the depths. Psalm 130:1.

Rollercoaster. Who loves them? Who can hardly bear to even watch them? It has been said that 'life is like a rollercoaster' but I suspect that whoever said that first was thinking of the old style, up and down a bit, type where you didn't need to get strapped in and walk past signs warning you that if you had numerous health conditions 'just walk away!' Up and down. On a rollercoaster. Life is like that. Some highs and some lows.

Rollercoasters these days, or should I say 'terror inducing thrill rides!' are not just up and down. When I was at Movie World recently I went on several and the last one, the biggest, nearly did me in. It was embarrassing to be sitting there full of anxiety alongside an 8 year old girl who told me with a smile that she had already been on this one before. She smiled and laughed all the way through the ride. I closed my eyes a lot and there may even have been some prayer uttered. Up and down. Yes. And over and around and spinning and ... well ... let's just say I had to find a quiet place to sit down afterwards. In that rollercoaster ride I am not sure which was less terrifying, the low points or the high points – a LONG way up high!

I thought of rollercoasters because of the first verse of the psalm set for today. Psalm 130, verse 1: "Out of the depths have I called to you, O God". Although life can sometimes feel like that modern adrenaline rush terror inducing ride, it can also reveal that pattern which was there in the old style of ride, high points and low points. In all of our lives there are times when we are on the top and all seems to be going well, times when we can see into the distance, times when life seems steady and positive. And there are the other times. The times when we are at the bottom. Times when life sucks. Times when it is hard to see beyond what is immediately in front of us.

I wonder, what have been your low points? AND what has helped you to climb out of those pits. To be honest, some low points are like being on the rollercoaster. Life just continues and we find another different perspective. And some low points are like falling into a pit and everything stops. The journey doesn't seem to continue.

That pit can feel like it has steep sides and there is no way out. I have been there. I suspect that many of us have. What brings us out?

The simple answer, for me, is love. That has been my experience. It is when someone has been prepared to climb down into the pit and be there with me, or to sit on the edge and stay, keeping companionship, keeping me company until the pain has eased enough to recognise the little signs of the way up again. That is what has helped. Love and commitment and companionship shown even when I have been floundering and in many ways lost.

That has been the experience of human love. It is also the encounter at the heart of the Cross. It is the experience at the heart of the Incarnation. It is what Christmas and Easter are about. It is the experience at the heart of God's great gift of Jesus among us, sharing the rollercoaster of human life.

In today's readings I see all this reflected. That first verse of Psalm 130. "Out of the depths have I called to you, O God". It is a cry from the heart, recognising a heart longing for something more and different to happen than the pain in which we have found ourselves. In Latin this psalm begins 'de profundis'. From the most profound and desolate space in my life ... I call out.

The psalms are an amazing connection of writings. They touch on human emotions and experiences in ways which stretch easily across the thousands of years since they were first written. The writer of this psalm realises that being in 'the depths', being in the black pit, can be because of a combination of circumstances. These can include the actions of others, our own stuff-ups and just the circumstances of life.

In that mess we cry out, with hope. And that hope is that we will encounter a loving presence. It is more than just 'get me out of here!' It is also, help me to re-find my way.

At the end of the first reading from 2 Samuel 18 we see David being thrust into that pit. The circumstances here are a combination of the actions of various people, including David himself. Absalom is cruelly murdered. Absalom, the difficult, rebellious son. Absalom, who may have even wanted David dead and to overthrow him!

Absalom, who was being revolting. Absalom who, for all his faults, was still loved. Thank God that even when we are being pains in the neck to our parents or our children or our friends we are still loved!

Absalom died and David's grief screams at us from the pages of that story. Some children and parents may say and do cruel things to each other. There may be family breakdowns. But when lives are permanently torn apart we realise that however difficult someone may have been we still love them. There is grief, profound grief. Out of the depths we cry, and we wait for love to show a way forward.

In our reading today from Ephesians 4 Paul seems to be moralising. He seems to be giving the people of the church in Ephesus a long list saying 'don't do this!', 'don't do that!'. Actually he is expressing deep understanding and care, knowing that when we stuff up, when we live in destructive ways, when we do things which hurt ourselves and others then that is another kind of pit into which we fall, a pit of our own creating.

Have you ever said harsh, nasty, damaging words to someone else and then wished that you could take those words back? Words can be like knives sometimes. If we have ever been on the receiving end we know that is true. Have you ever hurt anyone else like that? It is so easy to do.

Maturity comes with being careful with what we say, being careful with our capacity to hurt others. We all may do that at times, but learning and choosing are signs of becoming mature. And when we feel regret, when we feel sad about hurting someone else it is a necessary part of the journey of growing up. Taking responsibility, learning humility, honesty and forgiveness, are building blocks for an authentic life.

This is the sort of authentic life Paul invites us to see that God wants for us. So, strangely, that also means that when we are in a pit it can be a creative place to be. In the depths we can come to deeper self-realisation. And who will help us out of there? It may even be that sometimes it will be the person who we have hurt most, or who has hurt us the most who is exactly the person to help us out of the dark spaces.

If we are the one who has hurt another person and we realise what we have done, then stepping into their dark place, stepping out in love and offering love and companionship and support, helping them to grow, will actually help us both.

Can you imagine that? Can you imagine being the way that someone who has hurt you is able to grow more and to get out of a pit of regret, despair, disappointment and pain? Forgiveness is the key. Not forgiving someone is like taking poison and expecting the other person to die. Part of us might want to celebrate a person who has hurt us being in a pit. But we are called to live more deeply than that.

The pits can be a terrible place, a learning place, an opportunity. They are a place to find and offer and experience and hope for love. Out of the depths we cry. And others cry. Are we listening? And as the people of God when we step into that space to share the pain and to share the journey up and out and on we are accompanied by God, who came among us, shared the pain and who also looks forward with us to the journey upwards.

Amen.

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