

A New Song
Psalm 40 + Matthew 6: 25-34
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We are spending this week and last week with two Psalms. Psalm 69 last week and Psalm 40 this week.

Scholar Walter Brueggemann says the Psalms express three experiences of life with God: orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. As I stumbled across this a few weeks ago, I thought, "hmm, this might be helpful," since our church is in a place of disorientation right now. We are preparing to say farewell to Pastor Abby who has been at the center of the life of First UCC for six years. Her ministry has changed lives. She has been a rock for those who have turned to her for care and counseling. Her words have been both a clear witness for justice, and they have been wise, providing us with new and helpful images for our journey with the Holy.

The news of a beloved pastor leaving is disorienting. It throws the life of a church up in the air. This is no fault of Pastor Abby's. Pastoral transitions happen, and she has stayed with us more than twice as long as an average pastor in a first call out of seminary in an Associate role. She has also been doing exactly what a pastor should be doing for a congregation as we are saying goodbye. Her calendar has been full of coffees and lunches and conversations. She's been pulling her institutional knowledge out of her mind like a character in Harry Potter and placing it in the pensieve for the rest of the staff to consider and examine. And we will gather to thank her and bless her on Wednesday evening and next Sunday in worship.

Abby will depart and July will arrive, and we will be disoriented as a church. For a while. We will take time in July to take a breath and have listening sessions and have the conversations we need to have. The Council has had two very good meetings. The leadership is doing its work thoughtfully. They are serving the church very well right now. And, there will be grief and transition and it will feel like things are up in the air for a while.

The Psalms of disorientation, like Psalm 69 that we read last week, go deeper than the feeling of things "being up in the air." They go to the depths of human crisis and suffering and express those feelings. There's no holding back. Brueggemann says they speak to the experience of the bottom falling out of life and the tradition feeling like a lie. Last week as he was leaving worship, our own Biblical scholar Bill Poelhman said to me, "it's public venting for the community."

But then there are Psalms of **re-orientation**. Psalms that Brueggemann says, "spring out of a time when faith in a trustworthy God and creation are found again, but the experience of disorientation is not forgotten." These are Psalms that not only spring out of the times when life

fits back together again, but they are Psalms that provide hope for those times of disorientation. Our ancestors express to us, “you know, God does this thing, leading from wilderness and exile to a new home, from crucifixion through three long days until resurrection breaks through, from disorientation to reorientation. God does this. It takes time, and God often has a weird way of doing it, but God does it. So don’t worry about your life, as Jesus says in Matthew.

Psalm 40 is a Psalm of Reorientation. It responds to the complaints of Psalm 69 almost line by line. Psalm 69 says, “I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold.” Psalm 40 responds, “God drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock making my feet secure.” Psalm 69 says, “I am weary with my crying, my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.” Psalm 40 says, “I waited patiently for the Lord, God inclined to me and heard my cry, putting a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.

The most famous setting of Psalm 40 is by the band U2. Simply titled “40,” it is the last track on their 1983 album “War.” The song “40” is a hopeful last note on this album that begins with the song, “Sunday, Bloody Sunday,” a song about the events of Sunday January 30th 1972 where soldiers in the British Army fired on a group of civil rights protestors. “40” has been U2’s standard encore song at their concerts. Of all their songs, “40” is what U2 wants to leave their audience with as they go. Have any of you been to a U2 concert? I’m going to play 2 or 3 minutes a portion of ‘40” in concert (so that you can say church was like a U2 concert.)

Play [U2 40](#)

Interestingly, the line “ how long must we sing this song,” is a line in Sunday Bloody Sunday, this song protesting violence and war. And then in “40” the last song of the album, that same line, “how long to sing this song,” and “I will sing a new song,” are right next to each other. Just like the Psalms, just like the movement of the Christian faith, moving from disorientation to reorientation. Bono’s not just a pretty face, he knows what he’s doing.

That song was the hopeful soundtrack of my week, and I wanted to share it with you. There was another hopeful story for me this week to share too.

On Wednesday I took my clergy collar off and had my legislator hat on. I was a part of a legislator panel in Mankato through the Region 9 Development Coalition, then after that we went to St. Peter to hear from city leaders there who are doing amazing work with equity and inclusion.

We heard from the school superintendent, a communications professor at Gustavus, and three members of the Somali community. There is a large Somali community in St. Peter. They have an active Islamic Center and an advocacy group. The Somali community reached out to the schools to build a relationship because they wanted what was best for their children. The schools responded well. The communications department has a class that is sending students

out to facilitate communication between different members of the community and they are having conversations about race and culture, and they are building bridges.

The moment that really made me smile was when one of the Somali members said that their community was preparing to be in St. Peter's 4th of July Parade for the second time. After the presentation I went up to speak with the Somali members on the panel, and I said, "How great that you are going to be in the 4th of July parade." One said to me, "Yes, we were at the Islamic Center last night preparing. We're getting a big group together, we are getting t-shirts, and we are working on our float." How American is that? T-shirts and building a float for the 4th of July parade. I was walking out next to Ayeh, a woman in our group who is also Somali and from St. Peter. I mentioned the parade to her and she said, "I wasn't in the parade last year, but I went to it, and when the Islamic Center walked by, people clapped and cheered. It was very beautiful."

That's a new song. The crisis at the southern border is about more than the southern border, and Mexico, and Guatemala and Central America, and Africa. This is all connected to worldwide dislocation and whether we will see ourselves as one worldwide community that is in this together. There's an old song being sung, and the President as singing it and he will sing it every chance he has over the next two years, but its a bad song.

But there's a new song. I heard it and saw it in St. Peter this week. You can see it too if you travel to St. Peter on the 4th of July. A New American community taking their place in the American story and an established community welcoming them in and cheering them on.

This is the movement of God the scriptures witness to over and over. New life in the midst of pain and struggle that brings reorientation. No denial of what is painful and hard, but new life in the midst of it. God works this new life in the midst of our lives, in the midst of the ministry of churches, in the midst of our world and our communities. In times of disorientation, may we hear hopeful words and wait patiently, not shying away from our grief, and trusting that God remains with us. Amen.