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Psalm 40:1-10

Preached at Trinity CRC

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- ¹ I waited patiently for the Lord;
he turned to me and heard my cry.
- ² He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.
- ³ He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear the Lord
and put their trust in him.
- ⁴ Blessed is the one
who trusts in the Lord,
who does not look to the proud,
to those who turn aside to false gods.
- ⁵ Many, Lord my God,
are the wonders you have done,
the things you planned for us.
None can compare with you;
were I to speak and tell of your deeds,
they would be too many to declare.
- ⁶ Sacrifice and offering you did not desire—
but my ears you have opened—
burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.
- ⁷ Then I said, “Here I am, I have come—
it is written about me in the scroll.
- ⁸ I desire to do your will, my God;
your law is within my heart.”
- ⁹ I proclaim your saving acts in the great assembly;
I do not seal my lips, Lord,
as you know.
- ¹⁰ I do not hide your righteousness in my heart;
I speak of your faithfulness and your saving help.
I do not conceal your love and your faithfulness
from the great assembly.

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

A few years ago Kristi and I took a trip to Zion National Park (Utah) to do some hiking.

We drove to the trail head that we researched online and parked the car.

To get to the trail we scrambled down some rocks...

Crossed over a dry stream bed...

And climbed up a pretty steep rock face.

We didn't see any other boot prints on the trail—

So we knew it wasn't well traveled—

But clearly this was the trail we were looking for.

We hiked along with trees on our right and left and the solid dirt path under of us...

Kristi was leading the way and was about to step up to where the trail climbed a bit...

When all of a sudden her foot dropped through a pit of mud.

She panicked for a second, looking for a branch to grab onto...

She was up to her knee in mud...

Luckily her husband was not only handsome, but also quick on his feet...

I grabbed her by her pack and pulled her to solid ground.

This is where my mind immediately went reading our Psalm:

When it talks about the slimy pit, being stuck in the mud and mire.

Has this ever happened to you before?

Where you step in the mud and you sink down to your ankles...

You try to pull yourself out but the suction is too strong.

Eventually you pull up so hard with your leg that your foot pops out of your shoe...

And you're left trying to balance on one leg...

While you reach down to rescue your once clean shoe from the muddy depths.

I think our farmers are well-acquainted with mud.

Towards the end of our summer there was a lot of rain and some snow.

I talked to a few of you who said that the fields were just too muddy to harvest the crop.

I used to have an S-10 pickup truck, much like the one Pastor Rich drives now...

And it seems like I was always getting this thing stuck.

I remember one time in high school I went to a volleyball match...

The parking lot was full so a bunch of cars, myself included, parked in the grass.

When I went to leave after the game my rear tires started spinning.

I tried rocking it back and forth...

But I just kept shooting up mud...

The more I tried the deeper I went.

After that wasn't working I got out and looked and saw that I was buried almost up to the frame...

Someone with a chain had to eventually pull me out.

The literal reading in verse 2 calls this the "mud of mud."

The author places these two words together for emphasis.

It's not just mud...

This is the mud of mud.

This is the sticky stuff...

The stuff that really grabs on to you and holds you down.

We know what it's like to be stuck in the mud...

Especially when this relates not to physical mud, but to life's struggles.

It might not be anything that we've done...

Maybe we've hit a rough patch lately:

A loved one has passed away or has gotten sick;

Work has been especially busy and stressful;

The kids have been fussy or rambunctious...

And you can't seem to catch a break.

And just when you think that you're about to climb out of the mud...

You get hit with broken relationship;

An injury that keeps you from being mobile;

Or a car repair that empties your wallet.

Sometimes these things happen in life...

Where we just seem to be walking along and find ourselves knee deep in a pit of sticky mud.

But other times we see the pit of mud ahead...

And we proceed without slowing down.

Sometimes we even willfully jump in...

Our actions have consequences.

We know what's going to happen if we drink too much:

Saying and doing things that cause us harm now and trouble later.

We know what's going to happen if we start cruising the pages of social media:

Looking up that old crush from high school wondering what they're up to...

Living in a fantasy world that takes us out of our present reality...

Maybe even causing the start of an affair.

Or spending so much time on the computer that we neglect the things we *need* to be doing.

A lot of times we get ourselves into trouble with our words and our pride:

We know that saying certain hurtful things brings on lasting consequences...

But our pride keeps us from restraining ourselves...

And so we end up in the "mud of mud" of life...

Spinning our wheels, sinking deeper and deeper into trouble unable to get out.

This may seem innocent enough...

"What's the problem with getting a little dirty?"

"A little mud never hurt anyone, right?"...

Until we realize what our psalmist is talking about.

This is not just falling into a pit of mud as *we* think of it...

It's not just losing your boot on a hike...

Or your truck in a soft, grass lot.

The NIV translates verse 2 by calling it a slimy pit...

But another translation goes a little further calling it the “desolate pit.” (NRSV)

Still another calls it the “pit of destruction.” (NASB, ESV)

The actual Hebrew translates it as the “pit of roaring (water)”...

Which is a reference to Sheol in the Psalms...

Or the realm of the dead.

In Sheol there is no light;

There is no remembrance;

There is no praise of God;

Listen to how Job describes it (Job 10:21-22):

the place of no return,
the land of gloom and utter darkness,
the land of deepest night,
of utter darkness and disorder,
where even the light is like darkness.

When we talk about being in the pit, we’re not talking about getting dirty—

This isn’t mud that wipes off—

We’re talking about death.

If not physical death right now, than spiritual death.

Cut off from all hope;

Cut off from any semblance of love and all that is right;

Cut off from our source of life...

Abandoned to utter gloom and darkness.

This is what our sin does.

This is the condition of all of those who aren’t in Christ.

Because our sin doesn’t just leave a few mud stains on our clothes...

It kills us:

It drags us down and takes our life.

The wages of our sin is death we’re told (Rom 8).

This is what we've earned as a result of our turning from God.

But, brothers and sisters in Christ, in his mercy God turns to us and hears our cry...

God stoops down to us...

The Almighty God—the one whom we've offended and sinned against—

Is the one who inclines his ear toward us.

He doesn't stay in heaven saying, "Why can't these people do better?!"

"Can't they pull themselves out of the pit?"

No, God knows that our need is far too great...

He knows that we're forever lost unless he intervenes.

So God actually comes down to us...

The creator of the sun and the moon and the stars and the vast oceans becomes one of us...

He becomes a human like us.

And he doesn't just stand at the edge of the muddy, slimy pit of destruction offering his hand.

He doesn't just reach out his arm and say, "Just a little closer, you're almost there!"

No, he jumps into the pit with us...

He jumps in and actually takes our place.

We're set free from the pit of destruction and given new life.

Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, is sent on a rescue mission:

He comes down to us;

Into our darkness and gloom...

Into the mud of mud of death...

He finds us lying in the pit, lost to a world of desolation and hopelessness...

Dead in our sin and transgression...

And he carries us out.

He humbles himself—

Giving up his life on the torture instrument known as the cross—

Experiencing the darkest gloom of physical and spiritual death so that we might have life.

God poured out his goodness and mercy on us—

We who are guilty and worthy of death and eternal destruction—
Giving us his Son to die, and raising him to life for our justification and eternal life with him.

How do we respond to such a rescue?

Well, how did our psalmist respond?

Our psalmist responds in 2 ways:

One way is to live a life of obedience:

“I desire to do your will, O God; your law is within my heart.”

Not only do we have God’s word before us—

Able to hold it in our hands and seek out God’s will for us in it—

He’s also written his ways onto our hearts...

Your way is within my heart.

For those in Christ, God’s Spirit lives in us, moving us and prompting us to lives of obedience.

How often do we turn away from that prompting?

How often do we say, “I should really do that...?” and then the moment passes.

Just the other day Kristi and I were driving down by the UofA hospital...

We were stopped at a light and there was an older man wanting to cross the road.

You could tell he was confused that he wasn’t getting the walk sign...

We guessed that he didn’t push the cross-walk button.

I turned the van and kept driving...but we both had the same thought...

“We should’ve helped!”

The Spirit of God was prompting us and we declined to join in his work.

That Spirit is constantly moving in us, stirring in our hearts...

And calling us to obedience.

The other way our psalmist responds to God’s grace—

Is that he opens his mouth:

“God put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.”

Not only does God rescue, but he supplies the hymn of praise.

A great act of deliverance has been performed...

And now the psalmist cannot help but to tell others:

“I proclaim your saving acts in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, Lord, as you know. ¹⁰ I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and your saving help. I do not conceal your love and your faithfulness from the great assembly.”

The testimony of God’s faithfulness and saving works is shared with all...

It’s meant to bring hope to the hopeless...

And light to those living in darkness.

And God uses these words of praise to turn hearts back to him.

“Many will see and fear and *put their trust in him.*”

Our response is a testimony to God’s work...

His work of saving us in Christ;

And also his continued work in our lives.

One easy way to do this is at the dinner table...

Asking the simple question: “Where did you see God work in your day today?”

Was it in the simple smile or act of kindness by a stranger when your day wasn’t going great?

Was it in the way your 2-year old praised God in a way that filled your heart full of joy?

Or maybe it was simply recognizing the beauty of creation...

Watching a rabbit bounce across the yard...

Or listening to a magpie squawk.

God’s fingerprints are all over our day—

In good times and in struggle, his “signature moves” are on display before us all of the time:

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control, forgiveness, perseverance.

Look for where God is at work in your life and share that with others;

Take time to recount the faithfulness of the Lord...

You never know whose heart might be turned to him as a result of your sharing.

And that's what we're going to do now.

We're going to enter into a time of thanksgiving...