It was 1736. Two brothers commissioned as Anglican missionaries boarded a ship that would take them to America. These two brothers were very educated – they both went to Oxford. Both brothers also grew up in a strong Christian family and were well respected in their communities as faith leaders.

While on board this ship, a great storm came. A storm so big that it threatened to shipwreck everyone on board. Both of the brothers panicked for their lives – along with most people on board. Most people, but not a certain community. A group of German protestants, Moravians, were hosting a worship service. The men, women, and children were praising God loudly – not displaying any fear at all, rather a great peace as death threatened all of them.

The storm eventually subsided and everyone was ok. They reached their destination and got off at the colony of Georgia.

The two brothers were John and Charles Wesley. You might have heard of them. Both very influential in Christianity with hymn writing and preaching. John Wesley is considered the founder of the Methodists. It was John Wesley who was profoundly impacted by what happened on that boat. He wrote this in his journal:

"In the midst of the Psalm wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the main-sail in pieces, covered the ship and poured in between the decks, as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sung on. I asked one of them afterwards; 'Were you not afraid?' He answered, 'I thank God, no.' I asked: 'But were not your women and children afraid?' He replied mildly: 'No, our women and children are not afraid to die.'" The storm was boisterous, but the Moravians kept praising God. Finally, the storm subsided."

John Wesley was so shaken by what he had witnessed, he sought out council from the bishops of this protestant group. He was a missionary! Ordained! Smart and educated! Came from a good family! But he did not have the same peace and comfort as the Moravians did. So, he had to wrestle with that.

When I read Psalm 131, I think of this story. Psalm 131 is a short psalm that is expressing a faith in the Lord that is more than knowledge, more than our social standing, more than the family we come from, and more than what denomination we are part of. It expresses a contentment that even a great storm can't break.

We can also see in this psalm how we can get there. I don't know if John Wesley used Psalm 131 as a model to deepen his faith, but I do like to imagine that he might have. Because we can look at Psalm 131 that way too. Let's go through it together and see how we can deepen our faith to deepen our hope so that we can fully live out what we believe no matter the circumstance.

Verse 1:

Let's look at verse 1. A verse dripping with humility. Faith intentionally deepened through killing pride.

My heart is not proud, Lord,
  my eyes are not haughty;
I do not concern myself with great matters
  or things too wonderful for me.

In verse 1, we see an expression of faith, but also an intentionality to it. We have some control of our heart and we have some control over our eyes. We have to make a conscious effort. A proud heart and haughty eyes are marks of pride. Pride destroys faith.

We are to have humble eyes to view who God is and we are to have a humble heart to know who we are. There's a lot to be said about pride and humility, but let's focus on our context – when our heart is not proud and our eyes are not haughty, we are able to say: "I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me."

The message puts it like this: "I haven't meddled where I have no business or fantasized grandiose plans."

I remember as a young girl listening to testimonies a lot. Often times when I would hear a Christian tell their story it entailed something bad happening to them, but then they would speak about why God did that and how that shaped their heart. I could see events in my life too and how God shaped me.

For example, I've spoken a few times that I used to have an eating disorder. I went to impatient treatment in Arizona in high school for 4 months. Of course, I wondered why that had to happen to me. After healing and getting into recovery, I could see some of the good and could even feel thankfulness for it. I thought it was a mark of spiritual maturity that I could understand why God did some things to me in my life.

But I got older. More things happened to me that were unpleasant. More things happened in the world that were outright terrible. I tried very hard to figure out why God did what he did. I searched far and wide and racked my brain like crazy. I screamed at God for answers without getting any. I do not believe anymore that it is a sign of spiritual maturity to testify that we can understand things that God has done. Rather, I see it as a sign of spiritual maturity to be able to say with the psalmist: "I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me."

When we don't understand why God does what he does, one of the most natural responses our hearts have is to accuse him of not being trustworthy. It is not easy to trust that God knows what he is doing in those moments. When God doesn't do something that you want him to or does something you don't want him to do, what is the attitude of our heart? With what kind of eyes do we look at God?

In this context, we remember that God is our creator. He designed the universe, this galaxy, this earth. He designed me and he designed you. Here's an illustration to help us think about this.

My husband is a bridge engineer. He designs bridges. I love walking across bridges with him – I've learned a lot about parts of a bridge – piers, girders, and deck joints. I like learning about different types of bridges too. Once we were walking downtown and he pointed out this thing under the Low Level bridge and he said, "I designed that." I took a look and quipped right back, "I could have done that."

Just put some steel cords together and boom! Got it.

Of course, I could not have done that. I know some stuff about bridges, but this is way more complicated than it looks. Sometimes Matthias brings his work home and I'll take a look at some drawings. I have no idea what I'm looking at.

And you know what? I have no problem not concerning myself with it. I do not concern myself with advanced mathematical formulations this great and marvelous for me. However, I am perfectly happy to drive and walk across a bridge and feel completely safe.

Can you imagine if I needed to understand every drawing and concrete thing before I could go over a bridge? It would crush me. I have to have faith in the engineer and builders.

Our view of God, how we look, not with haughty eyes – eyes that think we could have done it better, but with eyes that see God as the master designer or all things – weaving together lives, time itself, space and planets, calculus, everything in a way that we can't fathom! God is so marvelous. So wonderful. And when we look with humble eyes and think of ourselves appropriately – as created beings, we can say, "I have faith in this wonderful God. I can trust him. I do not need to concern myself with things so great and marvelous for me."

When we kill pride and humble ourselves by remembering who God is and who we are, we can intentionally deepen our faith to deepen our hope.

Verse 2:

When we experience a trauma in our lives, of course we will lament and cry out to God. We are to intentionally look at God and move deeper in faith so we move deeper in hope.

Let's look at verse 2 and see how that plays out. Verse 2 (ESV) says this:

But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child is my soul within me.

Notice the words are in the first person. "I have calmed" … "I have quieted." Again, we see the conscious effort made.

The Hebrew word here for "calm" is quite a fascinating word. I actually was surprised I hadn't heard of it before. It is of course translated as "calm," but it can also be translated as "make level." Rather than say, "I have calmed my soul," we could say, "I have leveled my soul."

I love this because this implies when we enter in the presence of the Lord, we can be unlevel. I assume we'd all been there. We are worked up, upset, arms swinging, a soul full of emotions and lament. And in the presence of the Lord, we calm our souls. We make them level.

The word at its root can also mean "to compare or to make equal." That's how we level things out, right? If I have a weight scale and it's unlevel, I compare the 2 sides. I can see, "oh, this one is bigger or heavier and I need to move some of it to this side and then it will level out. Be made equal."

When we enter into the presence of the Lord, we can try to compare us and God…but we can't. As Isaiah 46:5 puts it, using this same Hebrew word, "To whom will you liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like?"

There is no comparison between us and God. No one is his equal! But unlike a regular scale, it is the seeing the bigness of God that makes us level.

The whole verse is "I have calmed AND I have quieted my soul." The Hebrew word for quiet is what you might expect. "I have stilled my soul" or "I have silenced my soul." Still that conscious effort. Part of the word can also mean "to be astonished." Again, we get this idea that we are so taken back at God's greatness that we cannot even speak.

So, while there is a conscious effort for us to calm and quiet our soul, we can also see how that happens. With these words, we get this really full idea that as we enter into God's presence, we calm and quiet our soul naturally by seeing who God is. His awesomeness is the basis of our calm.

Our soul is not to be restless with mistrust and going around trying to figure out God, but we have a calm and quiet soul that trusts in our Lord. The image we have is a weaned child with its mother. I am a mother and have 2 kids. They are still little so it's not hard for me to remember when they were newborns and small babies. I remember when Ezra was just a few weeks old. I just fed him and I thought it would be a good time to take a shower. So, I gave him to Matthias and I headed to the bathroom. Midway through my shower I could hear him. I begrudgingly hurried through my warm shower to get to him. I know what he wanted. He wanted food. That's the only reason he wanted me. Just to get something from me. And when he gets it – THEN he is quiet.

Ezra is older now, but still a toddler and he is weaned. He still cries for me or wants to come sit with me. But it's not because he wants food from me. It's because he wants me. He wants my presence. He likes to sit me with, stand on me, look around, and touch my face. And when he cries for me and he gets ME – THEN he is quiet. Not because he gets anything, it's just because he is with me.

He is still so young, but I hope that as he gets older and matures, that that desire for me continues. I want this from both my kids. That they will want to hang out with me because they love me. Not because they get something from me. Every parent wants that.

So does the Lord. The Lord wants us, his children, to want to be with him because we love him. Because we want to be in his presence, not because we get stuff from him. When we view God like a genie in a bottle, someone to get stuff from, then of course we reject him when we don't get what we want. God is NOT genie in a bottle. When we view God that way, our soul will be full of resentment and anger.

Here in this church, we worship the Triune God - the Lord God Almighty. Creator of heaven and earth. Designer of all things. He is clothed with splendor and majesty. He wraps himself in light as with a garment. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants. He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved.

When we calm and quiet our soul in his presence by remembering who God is and enjoying him just to be with him, we can intentionally deepen our faith to deepen our hope.

Verse 3:

Let's take a look at the last verse. Verse 3 says:

O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, both now and forevermore.

Faith like this produces hope. When we deepen our faith, we deepen our hope. Sometimes living in this world seems hopeless. It seems like not a day goes by when I need at least some hope. I assume the same is true for everyone listening. When I think about our congregation, I know some of you have experienced so many terrible things in the past and some are experiencing terrible things right now.

I read that Ted Hoekstra and Gera Wetch fell and Gera broke her arm. I heard that Doug Smith passed away so suddenly, leaving Genny behind. I thought of Lou Kingma who is currently battling pancreatic cancer. When these terrible things happen to us, we need hope. Not just any hope, but the hope that our faith brings. The deeper our faith, the deeper our hope.

As I was thinking about this, I wanted to give an example, so, I thought I'd ask Lou Kingma. As I just said, Lou has pancreatic cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy. We still see him in church on Sundays. He is still here. He is still worshipping the Lord even with that terrible diagnosis. I messaged Lou to see if he was up for a discussion and he agreed.

We had a free-flowing conversation and I was taking some notes and as I was listening, probably the thing that struck me the most was that when Lou was talking about this faith and his hope, he basically summarized Psalm 131.

The first thing he said was he has faith that God has a plan. He may or may never know what God has in mind. Then he said that he knows God has a great plan and knowing that, even though there may not be an answer, it makes his diagnosis bearable.

I pushed back on that a little to make sure I heard right. I said, "a great plan? Even with your cancer diagnosis?" Lou didn't hesitate to say a resounding "YES!" He has a faith in an almighty God and he said, "no point in me questioning him. I wouldn't understand what he was doing anyways." That made me smile a bit. He said that there is more to it then we may realize – not just about him, but how it's shaping people around him like his family and friends and of course us, his church family.

You can see verse 1 in those comments. The trust in God's plan as the designer of all things. The humility to say that he would not understand it. The proper view of God as being almighty.

That doesn't mean that Lou is totally cool with everything. Of course he cries out to God. He said something like this to me: "I have times like Job and I ask, 'why me, Lord?' But then I say, 'why not me, Lord?' I asked Lou how he could move from "why me" to that place of saying, 'why not me' and he said something like, "Well, we deserve so little for what we have left undone. Or things that God would prefer us not to do."

I had to ask Lou. Why do you still worship God? Without missing a beat Lou responded, "He is my God and Father. Jesus died for me. Why should I stop worshipping just because I'm not doing so well?"

We can see verse 2 playing out in those words. Going to God with the deep cry of anguish in our heart. WHY WHY WHY GOD! Coming to God being unlevel. Then being astonished at the gospel! Who am I to deserve Christ? To deserve forgiveness?" Then leveling out in his presence. Having the proper posture of who God is and who Lou is as a person. Going to be with God just because he is God, not because he is getting something from him. God giving him the ability to be content despite his circumstances.

Conclusion:

In this psalm, we can see that faith not only brings us hope, but faith informs our hope.

When Lou and I were chatting, I noticed a theme in our conversation. He would say little things referring to his past. Times in his life where God had showed himself to him. Times when God was so real. Times when his faith was tested and strengthened. His faith in this time of his cancer diagnosis had been developed over the course of his entire life.

John Wesley also had to wrestle with his faith after what happened on the ship. And wrestle he did. He got there after a few years and wrote about it in his journal when he was back in England.

Faith like this is practiced over time and could take a life time to cultivate. Charles Spurgeon says about this passage, “It is one of the shortest Psalms to read, but one of the longest to learn.”

A hope that this faith brings is so deep and impactful that the psalmist is summoning all of God’s people to it. That’s how I will end this sermon:

Trinity Church. Come. You are all invited. Whether you have been a member here your whole life or just visiting for the first time today. I summon you to hope in the Lord God Almighty as he is revealed in scripture. He is your creator. He is the designer and engineer of the entire universe. Humble yourselves and kill the pride that the Holy Spirit is showing you through his word and let go of any anger you are harbouring – see God for who he is – a God that loves you so much that he came down to earth to die willingly for you, to pay the price for your sins, so that you could be with him and enjoy him for all of eternity. Be astonished and amazed at what the Lord your God has done for you.

Trinity Church. Come. Everyone listen! Put your faith in the Lord. Grow with him, grow with us, and experience a hope so great that not even a great storm or cancer diagnosis that threatens your life can overcome you. The deeper you grow in faith, the deeper your hope will be. Seeing the awesomeness of Jesus Christ is the basis for calming and quieting your soul.

Trinity Church. Come. Still your soul in the presence of your God.

Amen.