

Text: Psalm 66
Title: Come and Hear
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For: Community CRC, Kitchener, ON
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We're living history right now.

The Waterloo Regional Museum has put out a call to help write our local chapter for the history books.

They're looking for photos and stories and videos that show what it feels like to live in this moment.

Photos of closed playgrounds, lines of masked people outside of Costco, videos of whole neighbourhoods coming out on porches and balconies to sing together or bang pots in solidarity with frontline workers.

First hand accounts of what it was like to be in Grade 12 and miss out on graduation and prom.

Stories of those working to save lives and heal bodies and keep folks fed and grocery stores stocked.

And our everyday stories...stories of boredom and isolation, of health and of sickness, of online learning and online frustration.

All of these details and moments and experiences will shape what future generations learn about in history books and study in class.

But they will know something we do not now: How this all turns out. What happens after this. How life does and does not go back to normal. Those future generations will know the whole story.

Living history is very different from reading history.

Which makes Psalm 66 a little difficult to connect with in this moment in time. Because this psalm is all about looking back at what happened then. At history. There's no sense of urgency or uncertainty here. The psalmist is talking about what has happened from the perspective of knowing how it all turns out.

If you have the psalm in front of you, it's pretty easy to see the different parts of this psalm.

The first four verses are a general encouragement to all creation to "Shout for joy to God!" Kind of a creational hip-hip-hooray!

And then the next section begins with "Come and see what God has done..." and this section touches on the single biggest moment of God's salvation of his people up til that point: The Exodus. The psalmist takes it for granted that his audience knows what he's talking about so you just get poetic allusions to the parting of the Red Sea, to being delivered out of Egypt and slavery:

he turned the sea into dry land,
they passed through the waters on foot

And this section continues by framing their forty years in the wilderness as a saving act too:

For you, God, tested us,
you refined us like silver.
You brought us into prison
and laid burdens on our back...
We went through fire and water,
but you brought us to a place of abundance.

And then the psalm takes a step back. Goes smaller. From the cosmic story of God's reign over all the earth through the collective story of God's people in the Exodus and the Wilderness, the psalm zeroes in on one person's story:

I will come to your temple with burnt offerings
and fulfill my vows to you -
vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke
when I was in trouble.
Come and hear, all you who fear God,
let me tell you what God has done for me...

The psalmist knows how it all turns out. He was in trouble. Things seemed dicey there for a while. And he prayed and pleaded and made a bunch of vows to God in the hope that God would rescue him. And now he stands on the other side of all that. Crisis over. Trouble in the past. And he stands in the temple with a heart bursting with gratitude and a pile of burnt offerings smoking on the altar.

Psalm 66 is telling the history of a crisis that happened, not living in the midst of it.

And that makes it a tricky psalm for us who are still living in the midst of crisis, of trouble, and wondering if our prayers will be answered. Wondering when we'll get to stand in a gathering of God's people once again with hearts bursting with gratitude and hands raised in praise for how our story turned out.

There's three kinds of psalms, according to one of my favourite writers on the Old Testament.

There are psalms of orientation for when everything is going great and life is just as it should be.

Then there are psalms of disorientation for when everything goes wrong, nothing is certain, and there's no easy way forward in any direction. (Sounds familiar.)

And then the third kind of psalms are those that come after a time of crisis, after a time of trouble and fear and uncertainty, where life is good again but different 'cause nothing is the same as it was before.

Psalm 66 is that third kind of psalm. A psalm of reorientation. Pointing us beyond the moment of crisis and trouble to when we come out the other side.

For some of us, despite our collective uncertainty, we're ready to join the psalmist with hearts bursting with gratitude because we've recovered from COVID-19 and we're thankful for health and good doctors. Or we're coming out of unemployment because businesses are opening back up and we're thankful for that regular pay check coming our way.

For others of us, we're not any where close to feeling like we're on the other side of our current crisis. And we're still living day to day in the hope of answered prayers. And it's all great that the psalmist has his trouble in the rear-view mirror, but that's not the case for the rest of us.

Sometimes it's too easy to begrudge another person a good outcome. An answered prayer. We see God at work in someone else's life and we say "Good for him" in a tone dripping with envy and resentment. And it's a little too easy to do that here in Psalm 66, too.

Well, God answered his prayer, his crisis is over, well, good for him.

But the psalmist isn't gloating about his answered prayers to make us jealous or win some kind of piety prize or to appear holier-than-thou.

The psalmist is a witness, a storyteller, pointing us to what God has done. Not just in his own life, but in the life of the world, and the life of God's people. For our encouragement. To help us glimpse the bigger story we're caught up in as those who fear the Lord.

Come and hear, all you who fear God;
let me tell you what he has done for me.
I cried out to him with my mouth;
his praise was on my tongue.
If I had cherished sin in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened;
but God has surely listened
and has heard my prayer.
Praise be to God,
who has not rejected my prayer
or withheld his love from me!

The psalmist looks at the history of the world and tells the story of how it all belongs to God as the One who made it and sustains it.

The psalmist looks at the history of God's people - the Exodus, the wilderness wanderings - and tells the story of how God again and again brings his people through fire and water to a place of abundance, a spacious place.

And the psalmist looks at his own history - his past trouble, his prayers - and tells the story of how God listened to him and did not withhold his love even in crisis.

We may not be on the other side of our crisis and trouble, our history not written, our story not done in this moment of crisis, but this storyteller assures us - through the story of God's people and his own recent experience - that God does not withhold his love for one moment.

We need each other's stories of what God has done for us.

We need each other's stories that remind us that God is at work here and now for his people.

We need each other's stories that help us see in real and tangible ways that God is with us.

This past week, at Consistory, the elders learned of the desire of Aidan, Aria, Naomi, and Justin to publicly profess their faith. And I gotta tell you, this was such a joyous moment in our time together over Zoom. Being reminded in this time of distance and isolation that God is at work in the lives of these younger brothers and sisters of ours. That these four want to make God's story, their story, God's people, their people. They have each come to a point where they are ready to say like the psalmist, "Come and hear, all you who fear God, let me tell you what God has done for me..."

Maybe in this time of distance and isolation, when we are all separate from one another, scattered and unable to gather together, there's an invitation for each of us. To turn our attention to our own story. To look at our own history and pay attention to what God has done for us. Each of us.

What if instead of the psalmist saying "Come and hear, let me tell you what God has done for me...", you were to say it.

What would follow?

What story would you tell?

What part of your history?

What part of God's work in your own life would you share?

The psalmist tells his story in three sentences. This week, I invite you to do just that. Take verse 16 as your prompt and write your own three sentence story of what God has done for you.

And this can be just for you, a private exercise of prayer and praise, but if you're looking for a place to share and be encouraged by each other's stories, then you can join me on Friday at noon by video or phone and we'll have time to share our 3 sentence stories with one another. (More details about that lunchtime sharing to come on Tuesday.)

We are living history right now.

And we may not know how this all turns out. We don't know what will be written up in history books or what some museum exhibit will include in 2029 as we look back on this time and place and moment in history.

But we know the bigger story.

We know the One who is at work in this broken and bruised and pandemic-riddled world.
We know the One who at work in our own stories of crisis and trouble.

We know the One who hears our prayers and does not withhold his love from us.

And we know more of the story than the storyteller here in Psalm 66.

We know that the history of God's people, the history of the world God has made, includes the moment of resurrection and the promise of resurrection.

The moment of resurrection when Jesus returned to us and rewrote history.

The promise of resurrection that wherever we are in our own story, the last word will always be life.

Shout for joy to God, all the earth!

Praise our God, all peoples!

Praise be to God,

who has not rejected my prayer

or withheld his love from me.

Amen.