

Text: Psalm 131  
Title: Like a Child  
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For: Community CRC, Kitchener, ON  
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**A couple weeks ago, Jakob woke up in the middle of the night. Crying.**

Jakob awake in the middle of the night isn't that big of a deal. The time between 3 and 5am has always been his favourite time to be awake for a while. Often this just means him babbling to himself and his stuffies or turning his crib into a trampoline and having a good jumping session before settling himself back down.

But waking up in the middle of the night - crying - is not usual for him. Not since he was younger.

Walking up to his crib, I saw my boy laying on his belly, alone in the dark, just sobbing. And it broke my heart. I leaned over the side of his crib, smoothed out his hair, and laid my hand on his back. And his little sobs stopped at my touch and he scrambled up to be lifted out of the crib. I took him in my arms and he threw his chubby arms around my neck and held on for dear life. And I sat in the chair next to his crib for a good long time. Rocking him. Holding him. Both of us in the dark. Until I felt his little arms relax. And his breathing slowed down. And his warm little body went slack against mine as he fell back to sleep.

Jakob and I ended our breastfeeding relationship a long while ago. So in that moment, it was just me that he needed.

Just me holding him that satisfied. That comforted.

Just my presence in the dark.

This is a moment, an experience, that happens all the time. A nightly occurrence for some mothers and children at 3am all over the world. A crying and scared child. Comforted by the presence of his mother in the dark.

**And it's this experience that gives life and depth to this song, this prayer, this psalm that we are giving our attention to this morning.**

Psalm 131 is a tiny psalm. Deceptively simple. So short that if you're not paying attention, it's over before you realize it. And it's found in a little collection of psalms that form a songbook used and sang and prayed by God's people as they journeyed to Jerusalem for their major religious festivals and celebrations. When they packed up and set out, these songs accompanied them on their journey to the City of God, the place of God's presence.

These songs are folksy and intimate. Simple. Without too many flourishes. And they touch on everyday things that might be important to a bunch of people travelling long distances together like being kind to each other and getting along, placing their trust in God when the road is difficult, the joy of family and friendship, and the gift of prayer and praise in the midst of it all.

**And into this song collection of everyday intimacy and faith and journeying with others is added this little prayer of Psalm 131.**

This psalm is attributed as a psalm "of David", but as Pastor John mentioned last week, this designation can function like a Shakespearian sonnet. Not written by Shakespeare but written in a form associated with him. And that's important to note because the Hebrew poetry here allows for this to be written by a woman, by a mother. In verse 2, the Hebrew can be translated as

the weaned child that is with me

And I love that reading because then this psalm becomes a contribution by a mother reflecting on her own everyday lived experience, on the child content with her presence, not needing more or demanding more. And she sees her child's contentment, his trust, in her, in her presence as an image of our relationship with God and God's presence with us.

And the way the psalmist does this is profound in its simplicity.

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.

Here this is a statement that summarizes all the wisdom literature in a nutshell: Don't be proud. Don't think more highly of yourself than you should. Don't think for a minute that you are God. Don't forget your dependence on the One who made you. This is the beginning of wisdom. Done.

The psalmist knows what is expected of her as a follower of Israel's God:

"I have fought my pride. Trying to keep from making an idol of my own self-importance. I have worked to be humble. To not think more of myself and less of others. And I trust you to handle the things that are outside my control. The things that are simply too much for me."

And then she looks at the child with her, the little one in her arms, and sings...

I have calmed and quieted myself.  
I am like the weaned child that is with me,  
like a weaned child with his mother, I am content.

A picture of contentment. Of trust. A woman of faith teaching herself to be contented like the child in her arms. A picture of calm and quiet.

**The picture of contentment and serene calm and lovely quiet of Psalm 131 can seem very very far from our current lived experience.**

Yes, our external lives have come to a stand still. Our lives have ground to a halt and we have been forced to stop. But our physical stopping doesn't necessarily mean we have all of a sudden learned contentment and found an inner calm and quiet. Not. At. All.

There seems to be two ways of dealing with life right now: Do all the things or do none of the things. Either over-activity or paralysis.

Some of us are a whirlwind of new hobbies and activities. We're baking sourdough. We're dusting off the old watercolours and knitting needles. We're organizing every nook and cranny of our house. We're learning a new language. We're in the garage building a new bookshelf 'cause why not.

On the other side of the spectrum, there's the paralysis that can set in. Where endlessly scrolling through Facebook or constantly refreshing the news page just leaves us so overwhelmed that we can't do or think much of anything. And we just see our phone screen time quadruple and leave us feeling more drained and exhausted than ever before.

Now most of us are somewhere in between those extremes. And it probably depends on the day whether we're doing all the things or just sitting on the couch unable to get going.

And then we may think we have a handle on this new normal finally, that we have made sense and come to terms with the uncertainty around us, and then we wake up on a Sunday morning to hear of a trail of destruction and death cut across the heart of Nova Scotia. And our new equilibrium is thrown off balance again.

Our external lives of isolation can appear calm and quiet. Quiet streets. Quiet cities. Seemingly quiet lives.

**But the noise and chaos and anxiety and fear and grief of our internal lives is a whole other thing.**

I think we do a disservice to the psalmist and this statement of faith if we think of her as some kind of zen master who is never perturbed by her circumstances and is always in a state of blissful contentment.

The psalmist doesn't say "I am calm and quiet" but rather than "I have calmed and quieted my soul". Which seems to imply that her internal life was stormy and loud and cacophonous at some point.

There was something in her life, in her soul, that needed to be calmed and quieted.

**But into whatever she was feeling and wrestling with and anxious about, she remembered and trusted the One who holds her.**

In the Bork-Bakale household, the four of us have all had lots of time together and we've been trying to make the best of it. Being extra kind to each other. Careful with one another. But we have each taken our turn to be emotional and distraught and just a little over the top. This includes Jakob.

Jakob is usually our even-keeled joyous little adventurer. Big emotions and tantrums are more his sister's domain than his. But there was an afternoon about 3 weeks ago where he threw a nuclear tantrum. With all the big emotions that an almost 2 year old can muster, he just let loose.

He cried and yelled and screamed. To all our interventions and soothing words, he just yelled "NO!" and waved his arms at us. Stomping and crying. He was a 30 pound tornado of anger and confusion, screams and tears and snot.

There's no reasoning with someone when they're like that. At all. Especially for someone who just can't yet self-regulate. So Brian and I waited. We took turns staying with him on the floor. Making sure he didn't hurt himself. Or someone else. Like the dog.

And we waited. And waited. Until he had expended all his energy. And collapsed.

I was the one there with him when he did. He threw his little body in my arms. Still breathing fast and shallow. Hands in little fists. Tears on his face. And he held on so tightly. And I held him while he calmed down.

Held him while he got quiet.

Held him until his breathing slowed.

Held him until he came back to himself. And me.

**And in that moment, I was all he needed. My presence with him. In his anger. In his confusion. He was not alone. He was held. And loved.**

Jesus told his disciples that unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. And I think this little song of trust helps us to understand why.

For little ones there's is an unwavering trust that someone is there for them.

When they cry someone will answer.

When they're hungry, they'll be fed.

When they're scared, there's someone to comfort them.

When they're angry, there's someone to rage at.

As adults, we forget this foundational trust. And Jesus encourages us to return to it. To change and become like little children. Remembering and trusting the God who holds us in his arms, loves us, and stays with us in the dark.

When God's people thought God had left them, forgotten about them, God spoke to them through the prophet Isaiah:

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast  
and have no compassion on the child she has borne?  
Though she may forget, I will not forget you!  
See, I have engraved you on my hands...

Psalm 131 isn't encouraging us to have it all together. To grow up and pull ourselves back together. To force ourselves back into some kind of pretend contentment, some fake calm and quiet.

Psalm 131 is encouraging us to let ourselves rest, not on what we can do or how we feel or what we know, but to let ourselves rest in the One who holds us until we've caught our breath, until we've unclenched our fists, until we've calmed and quieted ourselves in his arms.

If you are alone in the dark, scared and needing comfort....

If you're angry and overwhelmed and you just can't stop yelling "No!" at what's happening around you....

If you're done trying to hold it all together and pretending everything is alright....

**May you remember and believe that the arms of God surround you and hold you up.**

**May you remember and trust that no amount of confusion or anger or fear can separate us from the One who has engraved us on his hands.**

**Amen.**