

Psalm 13

¹ How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

² How long must I bear pain^[a] in my soul

and have sorrow in my heart all day long?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

³ Consider and answer me, O Lord my God!

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,

⁴ and my enemy will say, “I have prevailed”;

my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

⁵ But I trusted in your steadfast love;

my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

⁶ I will sing to the Lord

because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Luke 19:41 ⁴¹ As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴² and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.

⁴³ The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the

Mark 15:34 At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”^[a]

Building A Muscular Hope

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Chilmark September 6, 2026 Psalm 13 Luke 19:41 Mark 15:34

I want to begin with a brief snippet from a children’s book by Judith Viorst - - maybe you have read it to your children or grandchildren - - It’s from “Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day” :

I went to sleep with gum in my mouth and now there’s gum in my hair and when I got out of bed this morning I tripped on the skateboard and by mistake I dropped my sweater in the sink while the water was running and I could tell it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good , very bad day. At breakfast Anthony found a Corvette Stingray kit in his breakfast cereal box and Nick found a Junior Undercover

Agent code ring in his breakfast cereal box, but in my breakfast cereal box all I found was cereal. I think I'll move to Australia.

It WAS a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. Nothing at all was right. Everything went wrong, right down to lima beans for supper and kissing on TV.

What do you do on a day like that? Well, you may think about going to Australia. You may also be glad to know that some days are like that for other people too.¹

There's no doubt about it. Alexander was having Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day. If we were to read a little bit more of his story we would discover that not only did he wake up with gum in his hair and suffer the disappointment of no special toy in his cereal box, he also got crunched up in the middle in the back seat of the car - - and felt carsick - - and when he complained that he felt sick, no one even answered. Australia was looking better and better.

This is a classic bit of lament - - of crying out against experience of injustice - - and of feeling like no one is listening.

Perhaps the most well known prayer of lament is the one we hear Jesus cry out loud on the cross - - words excerpted from Psalm 22 :

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night but find no rest.

The Message Bible, an approximate paraphrase by Eugene Peterson, reads this way:

¹⁻² God, God . . . my God!

Why did you dump me
miles from nowhere?

Doubled up with pain, I call to God
all the day long. No answer. Nothing.
I keep at it all night, tossing and turning.

Like Alexander - - the Psalmist cries out - and complains that no one is listening - - but the Psalmist doesn't have the option of moving to Australia. Each in their own way give voice to despair.

A few months ago, I signed up for a series of podcasts called "Hope Portal" - - offered by Krista Tippett who hosted the **On Being** series on NPR for a number of years. The sermon title comes from her guiding question: *How do we build an enduring and muscular hope as we move through a time of almost unbearable pain and injustice?*²

¹ Judith Viorst Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day Simon and Schuster, New York, NY. (c) 1972

² Krista Tippett in the introduction to the Hope Portal Series - - words in italics are from her various comments in the series.

She began the series by naming what we are living with - - *simultaneously* - - *our ecological fragility and environmental degradation* - - *chaotic weather patterns* - - *an almost cultivated ignorance of scientific evidence for climate change*. - - *and what we may experience as political chaos and dysfunction*. Her series was completed just before the passage of the Great Big Beautiful Bill. That bill might well have been included in her litany of the dangerous and traumatic losses we are living with on a daily basis.

In conversations with a variety of wisdom teachers, the Hope Portal series invites us to consider this reality that: *at a very cellular level, we are affected by the pain being inflicted both on the planet and on us and our fellow human beings. In the some 30 trillion cells in each one of us there is the capacity to experience the pain of humankind and the pain of the planet.* At any moment, at the cellular level - - humankind and indeed, this beloved planet, are having a Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day - - - Sadly, moving to Australia won't change that.

So what are we to do with that amount of pain?

The Hope Portal Conversations invite us to understand *that the first step is to acknowledge the pain in all its intractable immensity, to look it full in the face.* We're invited to sit in our bodies and allow ourselves to feel the depth of the pain and sorrow going on at a cellular level as we hear the news from Gaza - - as we see the flood images coming in from Nepal - - even as we try to understand the pain of a very public trial on the front page of the Globe almost every morning. It is a Herculean challenge to even begin to integrate in consciousness the far reaching ramifications of legal decisions that permit and legitimize the infliction of all kinds of pain across the human spectrum in this country.

The scriptures invite and challenge us to sit in these fragile human bodies and feel and acknowledge the pain - - and, further, to allow ourselves to grieve and to mourn - - to feel our helplessness against it, perhaps in spite of our best efforts at resistance - - even to actually cry out against it all - - even to give voice to our doubt that anyone is listening - - perhaps to give voice to a profoundly *reasonable despair and hopelessness*.

When we choose to embrace a time of lament - - we are taking on a serious and heavy task in a profoundly loving service to the planet and to humankind. In some way, the pain of the world needs to be given a voice - - and that voice may be ours..

The awful truth of the matter is, that if we choose to love this world, to love our fellow human beings - - to love at all - - we are going to feel pain. Profound love and deep pain are two sides of the same coin.

Not long ago, Rev.Cathlin Baker introduced me to a word for the bodily manifestation of feeling the pain that is the other side of love. It is the Greek word for "compassion," often transliterated as "**splagchnizomai**" (**splag - ch - niz - o - mai**) (σπλαγχνίζομαι). It is used to describe a deep, visceral feeling of pity or mercy. It literally refers to the bowels or inward parts, suggesting a gut-level emotional response. It's the feeling of having one's "bowels yearn" or feeling deep sympathy for someone's suffering.

I think it is the bodily sort of clenching reaction I feel watching mourners carry white body bags in Gaza or seeing the photos of young children lost to the raging flood waters. **Splagchnizomai. Splag - ch - niz - o mai.**

But in the face of all the reasons for despair and what Krista Tippett acknowledges as a *profound and reasonable hopelessness*, there is also a profound call to the practice of a **muscular hope**. *Hope that is a*

muscle that can be strengthened and flexed. It is not dreamy wishful thinking or idealism or an optimism that believes that everything will be all right in the end.

To quote Krista: *“In the face of the over use and weakening and ruining of words like love and hope, we are challenged to understand **hope as an orientation** - - **as a way of seeing and moving through the world** - - Hope is a reality based choice, a calling, **a practice in the face of profound despair** - - Hope makes a leap of imagination - - Hope looks at the world full on - - and refuses to accept that things have to be this way.”*

Krista described Buddhist teacher, Joanna Macy, *“(Joanna) embodied a wild love for the world and a fierce hope that rises irrepressible from that love. She carried and lived an important reminder to us that when we love, we will also know pain, and we will know grief that can feel too awful to bear. When we talk about the muscle of hope being reality-based, that means that it does not call us to be brimming with optimism where that is not warranted. What we’re called to do is **stay present**.*

Lamenting crying out, complaining, **naming the pain** is part of being present. ***And when you’re present, there will be grieving to do.”***

But the Psalms also show us a pattern - that the great rhythm of the lament moves from the despair of “god, why have you forsaken me” to the rhythms of muscular hope.

Psalm 13 gives a glimpse of the rhythm and movement as the Psalmist cries out to the Living One - - listen to the first 4 verses:

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

² How long must I bear pain^[a] in my soul

and have sorrow in my heart all day long?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

³ Consider and answer me, O Lord my God!

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,

⁴ and my enemy will say, “I have prevailed”;

my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

And then, as Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggeman says, “There is long wait between the end of verse 4 and the beginning of verse 5.”³ The Psalmist has cried out in lament - - and sits with the pain - - and something happens in the space between verse 4 and verse 5 - - and a new energy is activated as the Psalm continues:

⁵ But I trusted in your steadfast love;

my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

⁶ I will sing to the Living One because he has dealt bountifully with me.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem near the end of his life journey, according to the text, he wept out loud with anguish that the city - - the collective and corporate lives of the people - - did not - perhaps could not, recognize “the things that make for peace!”

³ Walter Brueggemann in The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary Augsburg Publishing House Minneapolis (c) 1984 p. 57

On the cross, his anguish and despair is so eloquent - - repeating the themes of lament in Psalm 22 - “My God, why have you forsaken me?” Luke 23:46

And then there is an exquisite pause - - - and Jesus utters the most incredible words of trust: ***Into your hands, I commit my spirit...***

Richard Rohr in his book THE TEARS OF THINGS shares these thoughts:

I think of two Masai warriors I met in Kenya years ago. They were given permission by their elders to show me their “caves of grief,” where as part of their initiation journey, they had to literally cry for all the world - plants, animals, human beings, earth itself - - before they would continue on to manhood. Imagine! Would that we had such a ritual journey for American politicians, business people, prisoners, soldiers and clergy.

In my experience, tears have helped me glimpse the big secret that I still only half know - - that human beings are really made of love and for love. ***And we still don't know it!*** We can only cry it. Until a divine form of compassion enters the scene, we do not enjoy the deep alchemy that morphs human rage and judgement into holy sadness. (But) you don't ***think*** yourself into crying. You cry ***yourself***, if you will allow, ***you cry yourself*** into daring new ways of thinking and feeling. Because tears are a form of allowing more than willing, they lend themselves much more easily to the language of spirit. All things first and finally deserve tears much more than hatred, fixing, or denial.⁴

The movement in the lament Psalms is from a loud and clear lament to a place of trust and gratitude - - a renewed energy. The energy for a muscular hope is found in giving voice to the pain loud and clear - - being present to it in all its despair, feeling the cellular discomfort of **Splagchnizomai** (**Splag - chi -niz - o- mai**) of roiling in the gut - - Being present - - and then, again quoting Krista Tippett “*making the choice to flex a muscular hope that refuses to accept that things have to be this way - - This is a hope that unleashes energy, intelligence, and creativity, courage and persistence behind that insistence that things must change.*

This kind of muscular hope is a virtue - - but it is one that is not meant to be carried alone. We are called to surround ourselves with others who can carry it when it just gets too hard on our own.” When we are committed to this rhythm of lament - gratitude - and the flexing of a muscular hope, *strangely, interestingly, kind of miraculously* (and paradoxically), *this increases our capacity to love and act in this world.*

And what this world need now is not only muscular hope - - but a truly muscular love.

The building of this muscular hope and love requires adequate nourishment. So, perhaps we might come to the sacrament this morning understanding it as food and sustenance for the strength we need to keep flexing those muscles together.

⁴ Richard Rohr The Tears of Things: Prophetic Wisdom For An Age of Outrage Center for Action and Contemplation Inc. Penguin Random House NY (c) 2025 p.100

