

Have you ever opened your eyes in the morning and already felt overwhelmed by the day before you? Have you wondered how you were going to make it through the day? This may be how the Psalmist is feeling in the 4th Psalm. As Christians we are often taught that we are not supposed to have feelings like these. We should not feel overwhelmed about the day. It somehow indicates for some a lack of faith or trust. We are the ones with answers, with the upbeat mood. Thus, on those days when those feelings bubble near the surface we may feel guilty. How can I/we be so overwhelmed? In reality we have failed to be honest about life and faith and feelings. Simply put: life and faith ain't easy!

Our reading in Mark's Gospel is at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. He has left the carpenter's shop in Nazareth, his family and his community and embarked on the mission for which he came. He has been baptized by John in the Jordan and has spent forty days alone in the wilderness in preparation for the journey before him. He has called his first disciples, performed his first miracles (healed Peter's mother-in-law and others). The demons shudder in his presence. The crowds are beginning to form demanding more and more from him.

Even though he has spent those forty days in the wilderness (1:12-13) there is still a need for a quiet moment of solitude, a place to pray. Thus, before the next part of his journey begins he seeks a solitary place – a place to let the overwhelming emotions of the first days of his ministry go to God. The pressure is on. The disciples come, "...everyone is looking for you" (NIV). They need you to stay here, do more miracles, etc.

Jesus' response is to leave there and go to the neighboring towns and cities. The temptation would be to stay there and do all that needed to be done. But there are other people, other cities, other lives to be touched. To stay would be go against the plan set in motion to go to the whole world. He cannot be overwhelmed by the pressure to conform to the will of others. This is what the disciples and others would do – confine him to a box of their expectations—their vision of the Messiah – to stay would be to conform and that he cannot do.

The Psalmist is having one of those days, weeks or months. Commentators are not agreed on the condition as to why the Psalm was written. Some believe there may have been a drought in the area. Something has overwhelmed the writer. Something has gone wrong and he is desperate. His simple solution is to trust God. He urges the people to pray for the restoration of joy and hope. Put your trust in God. It is in putting our trust in God that peace and rest come. Their only hope is God – plant your crops – the rains will come. We have no control over the weather – our hope is in the one who does.

Remember an old story. An evangelist is holding a revival in a drought stricken area of the Midwest. The people beg him to pray for an end to the drought. He refuses but they keep hounding him. Finally he agrees. He asks them to meet him at 6 a.m. on a hill just outside the town. Many gather and as he looks out over the crowd he shakes his head and informs them that he will not pray for an end to the drought and begins to walk away. Dismayed the people ask him why. "Because no one

brought an umbrella!” The Psalmist is speaking of the presence of God in those overwhelming moments when all seems lost.

Prayer is discovering the mighty presence of God in the overwhelming moments of life. In Mark’s Gospel Mark records Jesus in prayer three times (now Jesus prayed more than that – but these are three important times for Mark). The first one is the one we have used as our text for this morning. The crowds are pressing Jesus to follow their agenda – overwhelmed by their response Jesus seeks a solitary place to be alone and to pray. The journey of faith is often filled with moments of temptation for us to stop, quit...change our destination. It is in this moment that Jesus sets the direction and tone of his ministry.

The second prayer time is recorded in Mark 6:46. This is a moment right after the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus recognizes what has just happened and how this will impact the disciples. He immediately puts them in a boat and sends them off to the other side of the lake where they will not be influenced by the pressure of the crowds. He dismisses the crowds and goes to a solitary place to pray. Here again Jesus is seeking direction and reassurance for the direction his ministry is taking. He is again defining the purpose of God on his life. There will be overwhelming pressure for more miracles, feedings, etc. Pressure to put aside the outcome of his journey to meet the pressing needs of the day.

The third time is the prayer in the Garden, “if possible let this cup pass from me” (14:32ff NIV). The play is moving towards its final climax. The years, months and days have now come down to hours. This is a moment of intense personal prayer. The decision of what happens next is his and his alone. It is for this hour that he has come, but, I think it is safe to say, he was overwhelmed by the enormity of the task now before him. It is not an indication of a lack of faith or any weakness – it is just the need for the assurance that this is the path. This is the direction. This is the final and only solution. This is the way.

Our burdens are often heavy. The Psalmist knew that. Jesus knows that. We have days when we are overwhelmed with the burdens of the day. We sense a need for help far beyond our own ability or the ability of those around us. Thus, we come before our God in prayer with the honesty that we are overwhelmed—we come in faith, hope and trust desperate and anxious for tomorrow—the words come that our God is able – our hope is in God and in God alone.

The Psalmist said it this way:

Many are asking, “Who can show us any good?” Let the light of your face shine upon us, God. You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grains and new wine abound. I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.”
(Psalm 4:6-8 NIV)