

# Sermon

'Out of the depths'

Year B, 2018, Holy Trinity Sunday



**“Out of the Depths I cry to You”:  
Lament as an Experience in the depths  
The Revd Rico Villaneuva**

**Text:** Psalm 130

**Introduction:** Good morning or as we say it in Filipino, “Magandang umaga po sa inyong lahat” (a beautiful morning to all of you). Thank you Jonathan for inviting me to share the Word of God this morning. It’s a great privilege to be here.

**Background**

Our psalm reading is a lament. **One of the characteristics of a lament is a sense of contradiction.** And we see this in Psalm 130. Psalm 130 belongs to a collection of psalms known as “psalm of ascent.” It is called “psalms of ascent” because the Israelites sing them as they go up to Jerusalem or as they ascend the stairs of the Temple. Usually, these psalms are full of excitement, since they will be meeting God in the Temple. One psalm of ascent which speaks of this excitement is Psalm 122 which begins with the words, “I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD.’”

But not all the “songs of ascents” are happy songs, as we learn from Psalm 130. Psalm 130 reflects a sense of contradiction. The psalm is called a “psalm of ascent.” The word “ascent” speaks of an upward movement, of going up. Yet Psalm 130 begins with the words, “Out of the depths.” It’s like going up the stairs only to fall.

**Lesson: Not everyone who goes to church/conferences is ok**

This reminds us that not everyone who goes to church are feeling blessed and happy. Some are like the psalmist; they find themselves in the “depths.”

What comes to your mind when you hear the word “depths”?:

- abyss
- darkness
- sense of being overwhelmed
- feelings of fear
- loneliness
- helplessness

The beauty of the lament psalms is that they give us a realistic picture of the life of faith. For aren’t there also times when we think we are supposed to be ascending and yet we feel down?

**It’s ok to admit you are not ok**

But they go beyond giving expression to these experiences. **They also challenge us to acknowledge or admit our experiences of depths.** When the psalmist says, “Out of the depths, I cry to you, O Lord” he is actually admitting he is in the depths, that he is not ok. He is telling us he is not ok, and that’s ok. As the title of a book I have written puts it, It’s ok to be not ok. There is room for those who are not ok. If I will summarize one of the messages of the lament psalms, it is this: “It’s ok to be not OK.”

### My experience of depression

But it is not easy to admit we are not ok. I remember when I experienced depression. It was at the end of my PhD studies in England. I worked so hard in finishing my dissertation. But on the day of my viva or thesis defense, after my examiners told me, “Congratulations, Dr. Villanueva,” I felt as if my whole world crumbled upon me. Everything that I have devoted my life on is finished. After my viva, I didn’t want to see anybody. I actually sneaked out of the college without anyone noticing me. I didn’t know where to go. Fortunately, I managed to go home. But after that, it was all darkness, I found myself in the depths. I couldn’t get up. I don’t want to get up from bed. I don’t want to see anybody. I felt hopeless. I could not pray or read the Bible. I was also serving as pastor of a church in England at that time and I could not preach. I ended up seeing a psychiatrist. I told the psychiatrist that I am depressed. And the first thing he told me was “that’s a good sign” or some sort of a congratulations. He explained that it’s a courageous act to admit you are depressed. And that is the first step towards healing.

But as I said, it’s not easy to admit we are not ok. It takes courage and also humility. Sometimes, we just can’t put words to our experience. This is where the lament psalms can be our companion. One of the blessings of the lament is that it provides us with images which we could use to describe what we are going through.

For example:

- I have become like a bird alone on a roof. (Ps. 102:7)
- “Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. I would flee far away and stay in the desert” (Ps. 55:6-7)
  - o I have felt this many times. I wished I’m out of a particular situation.
- I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me. (Ps. 69:2 NIV)
- “out of the depths, I call to you” (Ps 130)
- “I am like a man who has no strength” (Ps 88:4)

Which of these images express what you are going through?

**There is Someone to cry out to from the depths**

The good news is that **there is Someone to cry out to for help when we find ourselves in the depths**. As Psalm 130 tells us, “Out of the depths, I cry out to YOU. This is one of the unique characteristics of the lament. Lament in the biblical sense of the word is not just about grieving over something, being sad, or complaining. A lot of people lament today, but they lament to no one, or maybe to the government, or to themselves. **Lament is a prayer where we pour out to God our pain, our emptiness, our darkness**. It is a place where we come to God just as we are. The lament psalms tell us, it’s ok to admit we are not ok. We do not have to carry the load by ourself. We do not need to be alone in our experiences of darkness.

When we come to God with our lament, we encounter One who had been himself in the depths. When Jesus was at the cross, he cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” This is the deepest of all experiences of depths. That is why he is able to sympathize with those who themselves are going through the depths.

Are you in the depths these days? The lament psalm:

1. Tells us it’s a normal part of life and the life of faith – contradictions, darkness, experiences of the depths are part of our life as believers
2. The lament psalm challenges us to acknowledge this. This is important for many times we deny. That is easier than going through the struggles.
3. The lament psalm invites us to come to God just as we are. He is here with us this morning. So why don’t we come to him.

*Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!  
O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for  
mercy!*

But you may ask, how about those who are not in the depths?

Somebody once asked me how can he understand or appreciate lament when everything seems to be alright in his life. My response is none other than Jesus himself. If there is someone who has the good life, the best life, the most secure life, it is none other than God himself. He lives in the best place in the whole of universe. And yet, he chose to come down to this world. He chose to be in the depths in order to be with those who are in the depths and that through him, they may experience healing and restoration. As our Gospel reading tells us: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

This is the reason why Jesus came here, so that he can accompany us in our darkness, in our pain, in our depths. And also so that through his example, we too might learn how to accompany those who are going through the same.