

O LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
You have set your glory above the heavens.  
Out of the mouth of babies and infants,  
you have established strength because of your foes,  
to still the enemy and the avenger.  
When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,  
what is man that you are mindful of him,  
and the son of man that you care for him?  
Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
and crowned him with glory and honor.  
You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;  
you have put all things under his feet,  
all sheep and oxen,  
and also the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,  
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.  
O LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth! (**Psalm 8**)

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I take counsel in my soul  
and have sorrow in my heart all the day?  
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?  
Consider and answer me, O LORD my God;  
light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,  
lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him,"  
lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.  
But I have trusted in your steadfast love;  
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.  
I will sing to the LORD,  
because he has dealt bountifully with me. (**Psalm 13**)

I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up  
and have not let my foes rejoice over me.  
O LORD my God, I cried to you for help,  
and you have healed me.  
O LORD, you have brought up my soul from Sheol;  
you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit.

Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints,  
and give thanks to his holy name.

For his anger is but for a moment,  
and his favor is for a lifetime.  
Weeping may tarry for the night,  
but joy comes with the morning.

As for me, I said in my prosperity,  
“I shall never be moved.”  
By your favor, O LORD,  
you made my mountain stand strong;  
you hid your face;  
I was dismayed.

To you, O LORD, I cry,  
and to the Lord I plead for mercy:  
“What profit is there in my death,  
if I go down to the pit?  
Will the dust praise you?  
Will it tell of your faithfulness?  
Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me!  
O LORD, be my helper!”

You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;  
you have loosed my sackcloth  
and clothed me with gladness,  
that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent.  
O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever! **(Psalm 30)**

### **Psalms of Praise, pain, and possibility: Praying Together through the Pandemic Psalm 8, 13, and 30**

In the midst of this pandemic we've felt a calling to pray and have encouraged each other to pray. We've asked our congregation and our friends online and anyone else who wants to participate to carve out 10:00 AM on Mondays as a special time to join together for prayer from wherever we might find ourselves. In our first week with this exercise we were joined in prayer by people throughout our town and across the world; these prayer groups included the nice folks at Freedom Bank, school teachers, administrators, parents, several small business owners, and a host of others. We plan to continue that Monday morning prayer time in the weeks moving forward through this pandemic. You can pray anytime and we encourage you to pray all the time as we go

through this together, but 10:00 AM is the time that we can know that we are all joining together in crying out to the Father.

I realize this summons to pray draws to the surface a struggle for many believers. So many of us want to approach prayer in a serious way but find ourselves saying: “I want to pray, but I just don’t know how.” Maybe you feel that way. Maybe you try to pray and can’t find the words. Maybe you can’t seem to figure out where to begin in prayer, so you’ve kind of punted and avoided prayer altogether. We want to get past that response, because, I think we would all agree that we really need prayer right now and so it’s time to start wherever we are in prayer and grow from there.

There is good news for those of us who find ourselves in that boat of struggling through how to pray, because God has supplied a prayer book for His people right in the middle of the scriptures. Generations of Christians before us have used this prayer book as a launching point for prayer. The Psalms are special to the scriptures, because in most of the other parts of the Bible we find God’s word to humans; here in the Psalms we find humans crying out to God. The great thing for us in our struggles with prayer is that we can join in these cries. In the Psalms we find prayerful words for just about every circumstance in life that can help us get started in prayer when we don’t know how to pray. Here we find everything from prayers of thanksgiving and praise to sad laments and shouts of anger and everything in between. Some time ago we studied 3 different kinds of Psalms found throughout this prayer book that we called **Psalms of Praise, Psalms of Pain, and Psalms of Possibility**. This felt like a good place to revisit this morning, because it seems like we need all three of these prayers, sometimes in the same day as we process the changing landscape of this pandemic we’re living through.

The Psalm we read as a Call to Worship was a **Psalm of Praise**. Praise Psalms come from a place of appreciation for the good world that God created. We wake up in the morning and go outside and see sun shining, hear the birds chirping, and feel the wind blowing through the leaves and declare, “Thank you, God, for making all of this!” That’s a pretty basic summary of **Psalm 8**. God created the world and everything in it and we are grateful for it. That kind of prayer has a way of grounding us in creation and putting things into perspective for us. As we endure this pandemic, we don’t want to forget the God who created the beautiful things that we so often take for granted; Praise Psalms help us to remember. We lay down at night and awake the next morning into the world that God created and sustains and declare with the Psalmist: **“O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (Psalm 8:1;9).**

The Psalm Dahlia read was a **Psalm of Pain**. Pain Psalms express the most underrepresented emotions in contemporary worship. Most of our praise songs and prayers in church tend to sound something like the “Everything Is Awesome” song from the Lego Movie. Sorry for getting that little gem stuck in your heads this morning. Pain Psalms come from a place where we stick our heads out of the house in the morning to smell the fresh air and instead smell the sewage backed up in our front yard, feel the newspaper smacking us in the face, and hear the car alarm going off because someone’s busted the window out on our vehicle and stolen our laptop out of the backseat. Pain Psalms are prayers for days like that; and days that are far worse than that; and days that are full of the humdrum malaise that we experience on downy dumps days when we’re just tired of being cooped up in our house; and everything in between. It’s interesting that these Psalms are so under-represented in worship today because about 2/3 of the

book of Psalms are written from that place of painful lament. The sheer quantity of Pain Psalms gives us a clue about life in this broken world. Our God created our world for good, but now this world is broken and full of sin, sickness, and suffering. Ray noticed early on when we started streaming our services that when we deal with issues of pain, suffering, and hardship, viewership online usually triples. People re-watch those services and share them with friends and loved ones who are having a tough time. Pain is part of our shared experience in this broken, sinful world. Something like this pandemic and the anxiety and economic hardship it brings has a way of reminding us of that. We need a way to express that pain to God and the Pain Psalms provide the words we need for that. These Psalms help us work through what so many believers have experienced before us of shaking our fist at the heavens and shouting alongside the composer of **Psalm 13**, **“How long, oh LORD?”** How long will people continue to get Corona Virus all across our world? How long will we have to see the number of people in our community contracting this virus increasing? How long will our friends have to suffer? How long will I have to be cooped up in my house? How long will my business have to struggle? How long will I have to live without a paycheck? **“How long, oh LORD?”** How long? Asking those questions prayerfully doesn’t take away the hurt, but it teaches us to take our pain to the only one who can do something about it. Yelling at my spouse and my kids won’t help, violating the law and stressing out law enforcement officers and medical personnel won’t help, emptying out the liquor cabinet or pursuing other vices will just numb the struggle for a short while, but crying out to God can be the first step toward real and lasting healing.

The Psalm I read is what we'd call a **Psalm of Possibility**. These are the Psalms that come from the heart of believers who have been through seasons of struggle and come out on the other side. These are the prayers of a child of God who's been through a dark season of depression and lived to tell about it. These are the prayers of a servant of the LORD who's had to say goodbye to a loved one and endured terrible days of grief and one day woke up feeling better. These are the prayers of a people who lost their way and went through the mire and muck of confusion and doubt, only to find themselves lifted up by God and set back upon solid ground. We need those prayers through this pandemic, because these prayers of possibility remind us where we're headed by the promise of God. We don't know how far this illness will spread here. We don't know how long this social distancing and mandated quarantining will last. We don't know how far the economy will fall and for how long that fall will last. We don't know when or if some small businesses will reopen and what that will do for the workers who depended on the jobs that were created by those industries. There's a lot that we don't know and that can be frustrating and produce a lot of anxiety. Praying through Possibility Psalms like **Psalm 30** reminds us that there are followers of God who've come before us and lived through terrible times and come out on the other side of those struggles with renewed faith and hope. As we pray through these emotions we can eventually come out on the other side with the Psalmist declaring: **"Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning"** (Psalm 30:5). These prayers of possibility keep us grounded in the One who **turns our mourning into dancing**. Praying these possibility prayers reminds us that we don't know what the future holds, but we do know that God holds the future and can rest in that hope.

As we pray through this pandemic together, we need to express what we're going through as individuals and a faith community prayerfully. These Psalms give us the words to pray when we don't know how to pray; they help us express our **praise** and our **pain**, while keeping us grounded in the great **possibilities of God's kingdom**. We live in a real world, but God is ushering in a new world in Christ; our prayers through this season can keep both of those realities in mind.

**So, let's pray prayers of praise**, praising the Lord who created and redeemed us and holds the whole world in his hands even when it doesn't feel like it. **Let's pray prayers of pain**, bringing God our hurt and fear and disappointment, crying out to him with our honest, open, transparent feelings of struggle. **And let's pray prayers of possibility**, thanking the God who lifts us out of the mire and muck and teaches us the prayers of his kingdom.

At this time we're going to enter into a season of reflection and discussion by considering the following things together.

**Psalms of Praise, pain, and possibility: Praying Together through the Pandemic  
Psalm 8, 13, and 30**

- What role can praying through a **Psalm of Praise** like **Psalm 8** play as we endure the uncertainty of these unfolding days of coping with the current pandemic?
- How might a **Pain Psalm** like **Psalm 13** help shape our expressions of prayer through this crisis?
- In what way can we stay grounded in hope by praying through a **Psalm of Possibility** like **Psalm 30**?
- Spend a few moments thinking about and discussing how you're feeling this morning as you deal with this struggle? Do you resonate more with the idea of praise, pain or possibility this morning? Lift those feelings to God in prayer.
- Stay tuned during the week to [www.fbcwslaco.org](http://www.fbcwslaco.org) and our Facebook page to find opportunities to pray, give, and serve, even through this season. Join us next Sunday as we shift gears and worship together at the same time, but in a different way. Blessings to you, your family, our community, our country, and our world through Christ Jesus our Lord.