

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who delivers us from our enemies and in whom we place our trust, Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

As most of you who know I don't like waiting in lines and I don't like being behind a slow driver, especially on Route 49, when it's difficult or impossible to pass. Today's Psalm goes much deeper than simple impatience. It hits the heart of our most deep and secret doubts and fears. In fact, the phrase we have translated as, "How long must I bear pain in my soul..." can be translated as how long must I waiver and have doubts in my soul. Scholars call this Psalm an individual prayer for deliverance. They say it was written by David between the time when he was anointed King of Israel and when he was actually coronated. If that's the case, then on one level it makes sense that David would pray and write this Psalm asking how much longer he will have doubts about God's will for his life. If you recall the story of how Davide became King of Israel, you'll remember King Saul and David played a game of cat and mouse for several years with Saul pretending to befriend David, then setting multiple traps to kill him. During this time Saul's son, Jonathan, became David's best friend and would warn David before he walked into Saul's traps. This went on and on with Saul and his army chasing David up and down the mountains through the desert, and into caves, with David always escaping. If David wrote this Psalm during his time on the run, it's no wonder he would have his doubts about God anointing him to be the next king.

I say if, because the origins of Psalm 13 are by no means proven or settled. Even in the title we have a certain ambiguity. I mean if this was David's individual prayer for the Lord's vindication, then why is there a direction for the musical director right in the title? The title indicates this Psalm was somehow used in the Worship life of the Hebrew people. The most likely explanation is that the original song or poem was written by David, but later adapted for use in the greater congregational setting. The title and the direction to the music director were added at a later time when this poem was adapted for worship.

That's as much as I know about the history and setting of this Psalm, but as interesting as it is to speculate on its origin, what, if anything does this prayer of deliverance have to say to us nearly 3000 years after it was first uttered? My first take away is that it can feel like God is not always present with us and many of us wonder, how long we'll have to wait before seeing the answer to our deepest prayers and desires of our souls. In just the first two verses the writer asks How Long no less than four times! I'd say that indicates a pretty tortured person who is in genuine anguish over their circumstances in life. Waiting for God to answer our prayers can lead to people taking matters into their own hands. I do it. You do it. Bible characters did it. Take the case of Abraham for example. Abraham and Sarah were promised a child in their old age. After more than ten years and that promise not being fulfilled, the couple decided God must have meant for Abraham

to have that child from another woman. So, they took matters into their own hands and Sarah sent her handmaid into Abraham's bedroom. Nine months later Ismael was born. That child was not the one promised by God, and it wasn't until much later when Isaac was finally born, the son of both Abraham and Sarah.

We all have our moments when we want to rush in and do what we know must be God's will for our lives. It's really hard to wait for the Lord to provide when we know we can do things so much more quickly and efficiently. I have to constantly remind myself, God doesn't require swiftness or efficiency... God requires faithfulness and patience. For the most part, when I rush to act, things go horribly wrong, and I usually mess things up. When I exercise patience and wait for the Lord to show me the signs and to open the doors, things normally go much more smoothly. This isn't always so... Sometimes the things God has planned can't happen without much pain and sorrow.

Getting back to the story of Saul and David... David was not able to become King of Israel until both Saul and Jonathan had been killed in battle fighting against those pesky Philistines. That left the throne vacant for David to ascend. It was a bittersweet time for David because he still loved King Saul, despite having to flee for his life several times. He was also much more than besties with Saul's son Jonathan. First Samuel, Chapter 18, verse one says the souls of Jonathan and David were bound together. They loved each other. I

assume that means as brothers... My point here is that David felt much grief and pain in the loss of Saul and Jonathan even though he knew their deaths had to happen in order for his rise to kingship. God didn't use the Philistines to kill Saul and Jonathan. He allowed them freedom to chose and to live their lives as they desired. They were the ones who chose to go to battle against the much more powerful enemy and lost their lives in the process. God waited for them to exit this world before placing David on the throne. This meant there were no other successors having claim to the throne and David could rule without family infighting. This enabled him to focus on the enemies of Israel and to consolidate all 12 tribes of Israel into one nation for the first time ever. Because of this, David is still recognized, all these years later, as the undisputed best king Israel ever had.

Life is not always easy, and we don't always get what we want or need on our time schedule. What do we do when we know the outcome that's needed, but we're either not powerful enough to make it happen or the means to the end are just too dreadful to imagine? Psalm 13 gives us the answer to that dilemma. To be honest, the beginning of this Psalm sounds sort of like David is yelling at God... Sometimes we need to yell, and God is big enough to take on our best shots. God knows sometimes we need to get things off our chests. The movement in this Psalm, after the writer gets the how long accusation out in the open, goes from

tedious frustration to praise and trust in just 6 short verses. As we continue to pray and ask God to deliver us our faith and trust are somehow renewed.

Our enemies might not be as tangible as the King of Israel chasing us over mountains and through deserts, but we all have our demons. When we don't get an immediate answer to our prayers, this Psalm shows us how to continue in persistent prayer, and trust all the more in God's faithful love. This short Psalm moves from How long, how long, how long, how long to asking once again for the Lord's help. I tend to pray once or twice and then move on to the next big problem or prayer concern. I get the impression from the fourfold how longs that David or whoever wrote this poem has asked for God's help over and over again. So, after reminding God four times that he's still waiting, he asks once again for God's divine intervention. This time, instead of stopping and waiting for God to answer the writer moves to the final stanza, stating his complete and utter trust in God to handle his problem. That's the part where many of us fall down. We want to take matters into our own hands and fix things. This Psalm reminds us that isn't our job. When the problem is so big and the solutions are all equally bad, we turn it over to God and allow God to be God. You see our always wanting to jump in and fix things is really our sinful nature taking over, allowing us to rationalize our behavior as just doing what God would want me to do. The reality is we're just too impatient to wait for the Lord to deliver us.

For us Christians, especially for denominations that Baptize babies, the promise of deliverance from our enemies begins before we can even form the words to pray. In the waters of Baptism, God adopts us as sons and daughters and heirs of his promises, the chief promise being eternal life. In Holy Baptism, God delivers us from our biggest enemies, sin, death, and the devil. This “unholy trinity” might still be able to cause us trouble in this life, but ultimately they are defeated. I’m so happy that Elena and Ian have become inheritors of that promise. May they, like King David, turn to God in prayer and receive God’s love and learn to trust in God’s faithfulness when they face life’s challenges, even when the answers to their prayers seem to be delayed for far too long. When they wait for God’s answers to their prayers, may they also know they aren’t waiting alone. As Baptized members of the Church of Jesus Christ, they are part of the great cloud of witnesses who also wait with them for God’s ultimate vindication.

May we always remember God does hear our prayers and loves us enough to allow time and space for God’s will to be done. May we learn to ask for God’s help in our times of trouble and then to have the patience to wait as God acts in God’s time. As fellow members of the Body of Christ, may we all share each other’s burdens as we collectively wait for God’s final reconciliation of all this broken world. Amen.