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God of our Life

Psalm 66

Remember the day you realized you were completely lost? Perhaps what you'd lost was your job, or a relationship that mattered deeply. Maybe you'd lost your temper or your courage, or just lost your way. I know you remember because we all have that moment, or several of them, stored in our memories; that time when you were at such a low point that you felt like even God had given up on you and the only prayer you could offer was, "Help." One of these times for me was 14 years ago sitting on a pew bench in Austin, Texas. I was in my first year of seminary, just a kid, and I had no clue what to do with my life. I didn't know if I should be a pastor. I was scared to stay and scared to leave and had no idea how to move forward. So I just sat on that pew in the chapel. Some of you have heard this story so you know how it goes from here. As I sat there folks began to arrive for the chapel service. One of them was a man who walked in wearing his cowboy boots and ten gallon hat. He sat behind me and I didn't think anything of him. Instead I sat there agonizing over my life and whether or not God could want somebody like me. When the first hymn began we stood and started to sing those famous lines "Come Thou fount of every blessing." My cowboy neighbor's voice was clear and loud. With gusto he sang its words, "Sing me some melodious sonnet, sung by flaming tongues above!" And, in that moment, the strangest thing happened. God showed up, reminding me that God calls cowboys and God can call me.

That moment, that experience when we are so lost and suddenly God shows up—even if just for a second, has changed people's lives since the beginning of time. Our psalm writer for this morning sings about the times God has shown up for people in the past. He sings: "Come and see what God has done: he turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot." The writer remembers that God showed up long ago when the people were escaping from Egypt and God parted the Red Sea. He remembers that, years later, these same refugees were able to walk across the Jordan River on foot into the Promised Land. In these moments, when they were terrified and tired, lost and left behind, God showed up and changed their lives forever.

Then our writer talks about how lost he has been, how burdened and beat up. He says, Those people long ago had trials and I have also been through the fire and found myself in deep water. And something else they have in common? God showed up for him too. We don't know how or when or what happened. He doesn't describe it. It certainly wasn't as showy as a parted sea or an awaiting promised land. It was probably more like a cowboy in boots who sang like his life depended on it. Whatever happened, God changed everything for him. "Come and hear," he says. "Come and hear and I will tell you what God has done for me." Not just for those people so long ago, he says, but for me too.

From early on in our scriptures we read about these moments when God showed up and helped someone. Often when they would happen the person would commemorate the experience by stacking stones on top of one another on the spot so that all who passed by them would know that someone had met God there. This stone tower they called an "Ebenezer." The Israelites built one after they crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land so they would never forget how God had saved them there. Samuel built one after the people defeated the Philistines. And our psalm writer does his own version

when he piles up offering upon offering. “God heard me,” he says and so he piles up the offerings, rams and bulls, stacked like stones, announcing for all who will listen, “Look at what God has done in my life!”

In every life there are these stones. For some of us they are like this writer’s: they are offerings we stack, one on top of the other, because we are so grateful for what God has done. For others they are a structure of brick with foundations of faith that are deep and layers and layers of rock when God has steadily fed us all along our way. For still others the stone tower is a bit rickety and it sways with the wind but the stones are still there, celebrating that one second when God’s presence was real and how that one second has changed everything. For many of us this weekend our ebenezers are also headstones. When we remember people in our lives who, in their time on earth, showed us the face of God. That Ebenezer, that stone, stands tall letting everyone know: God showed up in her life. God showed up in him.

Whatever Ebenezers we have standing in the pathways of our life—be they sturdy or small, be they many or few—they all speak of that moment when God helped us. In that moment the story becomes more than history. It becomes our life story too. It is not just about those people long ago who God saved from slavery. It is about me, today, and what God is still doing.

In our stack of stones, we join the story of salvation. It is not just a story about “they” and “them” but it becomes a story of “us” and “me”. We step into the river with them and become part of the great company who have been rescued by God. The people before us have set up their stone towers so that all would know. Our psalm writer has stacked his offerings high so that he could tell the good news of his salvation. Remember the day you were completely lost? And remember that moment God found you? Now it is your time to stack stones and to share your story. Share it with your family and your friends. Share it with someone who is down and out, someone who is lost. Share it with anyone who needs to hear. Stack your stones and speak up saying, Come and see, everyone who can, come and see what God has done for me. Amen.