

Psalm 130
March 22, 2026
Fifth Sunday in Lent

Psalm 130

I had one more year of seminary and no clear direction about what would come next. I was unsettled. Where was God leading me? A pastor friend suggested this liminal space could be therapeutic — a time to focus and listen.

Psalm 130 is written by a psalmist experiencing a similar liminal space. Although we don't know the particulars of the situation, we can sense the distress from the opening verse: "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord." In biblical times, "the depths" often referred to the chaotic depths of the sea, a place where it was believed evil reigned. The psalmist is in deep distress, perhaps even fearing death, and cries out for God's help and forgiveness.

Repetition and emphasis

Psalm 130's plea for help is followed by words of gratitude and thanksgiving. The writer acknowledges God's power to forgive, which leads to hope (vv. 3–4).

The focus then shifts to patience. The psalmist trusts that the Lord is present and will eventually respond (v. 5). Finally, the psalmist speaks to all of Israel, reminding the

people that redemption comes through God's steadfast love.

Psalm 130 employs parallelism and repetition for emphasis. The word "wait" appears three times in verses 5–6. It is not just the psalmist's intellectual self that waits for the Lord's response. Rather, it is the writer's very soul that waits.

Another example appears in the repeated phrase, "more than those who watch for the morning" (vv. 5–6).

Commentators suggest this refers to the Levites assigned to the Temple's nightly watch. Their task was to signal the first light of dawn — the moment when the daily Temple sacrifice could begin. Dawn meant the long-awaited end of their night shift and the assurance of God's blessing through the sacrifice.

Themes in the lectionary readings for the fifth Sunday in Lent

Psalm 130 shares theological resonance with the other lectionary readings for this Sunday.

In Ezekiel 37, the prophet sees a valley of dry bones restored to living bodies through God's power. In John 11, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. In Romans 8, Paul speaks of life through the Spirit, which overcomes the power of sin and death.

Each passage points to the transformative power of God — the movement from despair to life.

The psalmist is in despair. We do not know whether the distress is situational, physical, emotional or spiritual. The writer pleads for God’s intervention while maintaining faith in God’s presence, waiting ... and waiting ... “more than those who watch for the morning” (v. 5). The psalmist does not know when God will respond, yet trusts in God’s mercy and redemption.

Relevance for Lent

We are entering the fifth week of Lent. Lent itself is a kind of liminal space — a time between what was and what will be. It stands between the incarnation of Christ and the promise of resurrection, between suffering and new life.

The psalmist seems to inhabit that same uncomfortable space. He wonders: When will help come? When will God release him from the pain? He waits in distress, yet remains confident in faith, trusting that God will respond. Therefore, there is hope: “I wait for the Lord; my soul waits, and in his word I hope” (v. 5).

The Hebrew verb translated as “wait” can carry the sense of a completed action in the past — suggesting the psalmist praises God for what God has already done. More commonly, however, the verb suggests an action that began in the past and continues into the present. The

psalmist has been waiting and continues to wait for God to respond.

It is faith in God's mercy that brings hope out of despair.

As we walk our own journey through the liminal space of Lent, Psalm 130 reminds us that God's mercy — ever present even in the depths of despair — remains an enduring source of hope and restoration.

Questions for reflection on Psalm 130

1. In what ways can you relate to the “depths” of distress the psalmist describes?
2. We live in troubled times. Where do you find God in the midst of difficulty? Where do you find hope?
3. Think of a time when you found yourself in a liminal space. What was troubling? Where did you discover hope while waiting?