

# SERMON DELIVERED AT AUBURN UMC, AUBURN, MICHIGAN

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

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Text: Psalm 42

Title: “Deep Well: Drink”

Most of you know that I grew up in the church. Our mother was the driving influence in our church involvement. We were hustled to church every Sunday with our \$.25 offering envelope waiting on the kitchen table every week to teach us the habit and gift of consistent giving. Learning about the Christian faith through Sunday school, VBS and then confirmation emphasized the need to think about faith, to be educated about what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Potlucks were a regular part of our church life as was hanging of the greens & youth group, all of which taught us about fellowship, to be in relationship with other people beyond our own nuclear family. In those fellowship experiences we learned the joy of and the need for a sense of belonging. And then there were service projects during which we learned the power of serving others as an expression of Jesus’ love for others and the truth that givers receive as much or more than they give. Serving actually feeds my own soul, I learned.

All those were good things to experience as a growing disciple: giving, learning, fellowship and service were powerful influences in my own spiritual journey. But there was something else, something more. The something more was a longing for God. From early in my life, I had a yearning for the Holy, the mystery and beauty of God, in whom we live and move and have our being. That longing expressed itself as I attended corporate worship, listening for the movement of God’s Spirit, hearing something in a song or prayer or scripture or sermon that touched on something in my own life. Some weeks I’d come out inspired and moved. Other weeks: nothing. I’m sure you can relate. Yet, in those moments when I found my heart strangely warmed, I knew God was present and alive. And in those moments when my heart has been hard or hurting, the longing for God remained.

There is a longing in all of us as human beings. It begins early. In grade school it might have been thinking if only we could be part of that group of kids or if only we were in that other teacher’s classroom instead of the one we’re in, we’d be happy and fulfilled. In high school, getting the driver’s license or making the team or achieving membership in the honor society or dating that special someone we thought would bring fulfillment. Beyond that, getting the right job, the right education, the right home, the right spouse, the right income, the right ...something... promised fulfillment and satisfaction in life. Always something else, something more to which we look for freedom from our human condition that seems to be built on this need for something we cannot even define but we continue to strive to find it. We worry about things

like money and debt and making sure our kids have all the right things we think they need to be successful. What do we do, then, with this longing that seems to be part of who we are as human beings?

The Bible is full of stories of those who experienced such longings. In Psalm 42, for example, we hear the voice of one who knew what it meant to long for God. We can hear it in the questions asked:

When can I go and meet with God?

...people say to me all day long,  
“Where is your God?”

<sup>5</sup> Why, my soul, are you downcast?  
Why so disturbed within me?

<sup>9</sup> I say to God my Rock,  
“Why have you forgotten me?  
Why must I go about mourning,  
oppressed by the enemy?”

This is the voice of one who was missing something more, searching for something more—some “One” more. It’s the voice of someone who knows what it’s like to meet with God, to be with God, to feel secure and happy in the presence of God. This voice knows what it’s like to be in relationship with God, so much so that when it seems God is absent or missing, questions pour out: “Where is your God? Where can I go and meet with God? Why have you forgotten me?” So much so that there is some self-talk: “Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?”

There is that well-known story told by Elie Weisel of an ugly scene in a Nazi concentration camp. The inmates are all called out of their barracks to see an atrocity: a boy hung in the yard. His crime: stealing bread from the guards. It was to be a deterrent for anyone thinking of doing the same. As the crowd of inmates stood around forced to look on the boy, someone in the crowd said, “Where? Where is God?” From the back of the crowd a whisper came: “God is with the boy.”

Sometimes in our faith journey, we can be at rock bottom, along with the psalmist wondering what happened to God? Even Jesus screamed from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?!” There are periods in our spiritual journeys when God seems quite absent from us and we long for more.

I wonder if it isn’t something like the feelings a spouse or children have when a loved one is deployed overseas whether it be for military service or for work. A deep, intimate relationship with someone is significantly changed by absence. And though there are phone calls and emails and skyping, there is still the thirst for the return of the intimacy of being together

again that will not be quenched until the deployment is over and you can hold that person again, feel his or her embrace again.

The faith journey can be like that, can't it? Although we've experienced the love and grace of God's presence and the highs of knowing and experiencing God's profound eternal love, there are periods when a sense of absence creates a deep longing for something more, the something more we know and trust awaits us because we've experienced God or we know people who have and seek that same experience in our own lives. Like that deer pants for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God!

So while there are those periods of absence and loneliness—sometimes even a sense of abandonment by God, there is that thirst within us that longs for God. We hear that not only in the voice of the psalmist using the image of a deer panting for streams of water but also in the refrain:

Put your hope in God,  
for I will yet praise him,  
my Savior and my God.

The psalmist trusts that though there are those around him who taunt him with the question: "Where is your God?" And though he is troubled in his own soul, "Why are you cast down within me?", and though the voice cries out:

<sup>9</sup> I say to God my Rock,  
"Why have you forgotten me?  
Why must I go about mourning,  
oppressed by the enemy?":

in spite of all these questions and the feelings that go with them, the psalmist does not allow the feelings of the moment to dominate and squelch all hope and promise. Yes, there are low moments in his spiritual life. Yes, questions rise when life appears bleak. But it's all temporary. It's all part of a cycle of faith. "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God."

What has your spiritual journey been like? Can you identify with the psalmist who expresses both a sense of God's absence and even abandonment and yet also a deep conviction of hope in God and promise that "I will yet praise ... God"? I'd like to invite us to view again the video clip from the beginning of worship. Listen, if you will, to the invitation even in the midst of the questions, the pain and the hurt expressed in the images, which are part of the journey through life, but also listen to the invitation to come to the deep well of God's grace. Take a listen again:

[View the clip](#)

The longer I live into my own spiritual journey, the more I am convinced that different people need different things at different times on their respective spiritual journeys. Maybe you find yourself standing next to the deep well of God's grace and you are able to drink frequently

and deeply so that your thirst is quenched. Maybe you've been to the well a time or two but find yourself thirsting for God but have forgotten the way back to it. Maybe you've heard about the well from others but have little idea how to get there yourself. Maybe you've drunk from the well so often and so deeply and are so excited about the gift that you're wandering about telling others where they can find refreshment for their souls as you've found it for your own. Maybe some life experience has cast you into a place in which you're in a dry and desolate place and you have no idea there might be such a well.

I'd like you to turn to #423 in your hymnals, if you will. These are the convictions of two saints of the church. Augustine of Hippo, one of the early church fathers wrote the first. The second comes from the heart and mind of Sundar Singh, a 20<sup>th</sup> century missionary from India. Will you read them with me?

Thou has made us for thyself, O Lord, And our hearts are restless  
until they find rest in thee.

In comparison with this big world,  
The human heart is only a small thing.  
Though the world is so large,  
It is utterly unable to satisfy this tiny heart.  
The ever-growing soul and its capacity  
Can be satisfied only in the infinite God.  
As water is restless until it reaches its level,  
So the soul has not peace until it rests in God.

We are all on a spiritual journey of some kind, and I believe different people need different things at different times along that journey through life because faith can be cyclical. Sometimes the path to the well of God's grace begins by asking the right questions. Sometimes those questions are addressed to God: "Why God?" Sometimes they're addressed to ourselves: "My soul, why are you downcast within me?" But no matter what questions we have lingering in our own hearts, minds and souls, there is the assurance that the thirst we all have for something more comes from the God who created us with this longing, and that longing is rooted in love, the kind of love that misses someone when we sense an absence. And what a gift that kind of love ultimately is. What would life be without the kind of love that results in missing someone? What would life be like without a longing for God, whose peace—as Paul wrote to the Philippians—surpasses all understanding? (Philippians 4:7)