

Psalm 13
Genesis 22:1-14
June 28, 2026

Affirmations

As I made my way to St. Louis last Sunday afternoon, I expected to run into some rain and perhaps severe weather along the way. Heavy rain was expected, as well as flash flooding. There was a tornado watch. I thought I could make it into Illinois before the danger came, and I almost did. The first drops fell as I was passing Terre Haute, which, as I am sure you know, is on the Wabash River near the Indiana/Illinois line.

By the time I reached Effingham, about an hour later, it was all over. For about twenty minutes the rain was so intense that visibility was difficult. Then it began to lighten. It eventually stopped all together. I had expected this threat *all the way* to St. Louis but found mostly sunshine the rest of the journey.

Closer to St. Louis, about thirty miles out, my car's nervous system came to life, and it was very nervous. It seems there was an imminent threat. Accompanied by shrieking sounds I didn't know the car could make, a tornado warning was announced. I was instructed to seek immediate shelter. The situation was urgent.

I looked around. There were a few clouds, but no wind or rain. The way ahead was clear. As far as I could tell, the alarm was a mistake. There could be an explanation. The previous heavy rain was not accompanied by funnel clouds and high winds, thus no warning; the later warning may have referred to

conditions just out of sight but within the parameters of the alarm area. But it made me question the reliability of the system.

I am taken, now that I think about it, by the difference between a violent storm with no immediate warning set next to an urgent warning with no violent storm. Sometimes life is that way.

There was a different kind of storm on the horizon for Abraham and Isaac in the Old Testament reading for this Sunday. After the long period between the promise and the birth of the promised child, the great joy and laughter of it was threatened by the instructions to prepare a sacrifice and to offer the child upon it.

It turned out to be a test intended to affirm and to increase faith, but Abraham did not know that it was a test. This reading is one of the most challenging in the bible. It seems to present God as playing a game with the future of the promise, and with the life of a child, all along providing a solution that in the end let Abraham off the hook when his willingness to obey was established.

Our trouble is based on a failure to engage with anything deeper than the level of the test, which runs along the surface. That God wanted to be sure of what was in Abraham's heart is a stretch. Our theology tells us that God knows the human heart. But the text does make more sense if what God wanted is for *Abraham* to be sure of the faith deep within.

In the end the covenant was renewed as well as the promise, and God provided the ram for the sacrifice. What do we do when the biblical message presents us with issues and questions that trouble us deeply?

With these things in mind, Let our attention be given to the 13th psalm. Though accounted as a psalm of David, it envisions as well the Abrahamic episode. The complaint was of a long period of God's absence, or visits from divine messengers, long enough to become a crisis, as it sometimes does for us all. For David we might see an allusion to the time when he was forced to flee Saul. For Abraham it was all those years between the initial promise and the actual birth of Isaac.

It is during the in-between times, like the later wilderness journey of the Israelites; that the waiting gets difficult, one begins to doubt the veracity of the promise and to lose touch with one's own deepest convictions.

The waiting can become desperate. Doubts arise. Cynicism sets in. Complaints materialize. The psalm gives words to use when we face similar situations; it gives us a prayer that starts out with questions;

"How long O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Given what we know about the instructions Jesus taught his followers, this prayer seems odd.

"If you seek your life you will lose it. If anyone wants to be my disciple, let him/her take up their cross (which means, one's own death) and follow me."

These words tell us not to be overwhelmed with our own immediate concerns, not to indulge in self-pity. The words of the psalm seem to be in contradiction to the words of Jesus. The words of the psalm are in violation of the instructions against selfishness, they seem unworthy of prayer.

And yet because the psalmist prayed these words, and because the faith of Israel accepted them, and because the Christian community accepts them, we are given license to pray them too.

Whatever our situation may be, no matter how petty and insignificant, how serious or justified, we are instructed to ask, that is what prayer is, asking.

How long, O Lord?

And yet, they do seem to be in concert with other aspects of Jesus' instructions to his followers;

"Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you; for everyone who asks receives, the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks the door will be opened."

“Always pray,” Paul wrote. Always ask . . .

There are no qualifications here. We are not given an order to ask *worthy* prayers. As a matter of fact, it is revealed that we are not meant to even try to make ourselves worthy, because we are unable to do so. It would be an impossible ask.

Ask even the selfish prayers and make the strident complaints . . . God knows how to shape our character and mold us like a potter with clay.

God has promised to be present with us as we learn and grow, and to wean us away from the unworthy to the deeper more significant issues of life and faith. Always ask. That is one of the gospel meanings: confidently approach the throne of grace, come into the presence of God with boldness and put your cares before the Lord.

The psalm gives the faithful a way to pray faithfully. It begins with questions and complaints, and somewhere in the midst of the complaining the burden is lifted, ever so gradually and lightly, until one can breathe again, and move past the complaints and the questions to re-affirm the deepest convictions that reside at the deepest levels of our being.

There is a shifting from complaint to petition, a subtle but notable shift; “Look on me and answer, Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,”

The psalm leads us away from the self through to the confidence and the re-embracing of the faith that sits underneath the surface of things, underneath the questions and complaints to the grace that serves as the foundation of our lives.

Sometimes it may seem like a loud and frightening warning with in the end no storm, and at other times there are long periods of storms absent warnings, or even guidance. Let us pray these prayers but not forget to get all way to the end where the assurance comes, and faith is re-established.

Then let the affirmations come.

“But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing the Lord’s praise,
for God has been good to me.”

[Back](#)[Home](#)