

Have you ever kept a journal or a diary? Lots of little girls do. Their diaries have pink covers with fairies or kitties or unicorns on them and a little lock on the side to discourage any security breaches by snotty little brothers. Until I got married and had a child, I kept journals off and on. It's the one place that you can pour out your heart without fear of judgment. It's a place where you can tell the truth about yourself, as long as you are brave enough to write it and read it.

You might tell me that you could never keep a journal because you're not a writer or you're not good with words, and I would say that you don't need any words. That's because you can let the psalms tell your secrets for you. So far, we've had the psalms as a hymnbook, a prayer book, a spiritual diagnostic manual, and a wilderness survival guide. This morning, we're going to see how the psalms can serve as a daily diary where we can put things we don't want anyone else to see.

Having the psalms as our diary makes it easy for those of us who are really busy. What with posting on Facebook and sending selfies on Snapchat and following friends on Instagram, who has time to write in a journal? I know that some of you share a lot on social media. You share about all the fun you have and the great food you eat and the friends and family you love. But do you really share the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth about what's really going on in your life? Unless we are politicians or Hollywood celebrities, we usually don't want the social media world to see our dark side. So where can we put all the socially unacceptable thoughts we have, the uncomfortable feelings, the un-Christlike reactions? What can we do with all the fear, the anger, and the violent impulses that we try so hard to hide?

If you have ever read the Book of Psalms, you undoubtedly have stumbled upon all of the above. As a mother, I care about filters. I can't tell you how many times I told Kristen from the time she was two that not every thought that popped into her head

needed to come out of her mouth. And sometimes I'd like to tell the writers of the psalms the same thing. I'd like to say that not every feeling that festered in their heart needed to come out of their pen. Sometimes the psalms are a little too honest for us. What most troubles us about the psalms are the frequent calls for vengeance. We wonder: is this just someone sounding off or is this psalm telling us something about God that we don't want to know? Do the psalms give us a God we're not sure we can love?

To be honest, Psalm 109 scares me. The author is clearly in anguish and for good reason. He is hated by people he has tried to love. He is falsely accused of pursuing the poor and hounding the brokenhearted. So his enemies want to see him broken. They want him to be tried and found guilty. They want him to lose everything. They even want to see his kids hungry and driven to the outskirts of town, where no one will take pity on them. After the past week, that hits too close to home, doesn't it? But after complaining about what his enemies want to do to him, the author of the psalm turns right

around and begs God to do the very same to them: “May that be the reward of my accusers from the Lord, of those who speak evil against my life.” Somehow this doesn’t square with our “love your enemies” Jesus, does it?

I wish I could say that I have never felt this way in my life, but then I would be telling a lie. It is true that I was raised in the subculture of Midwestern Methodism where the only good emotion is a dead one, but even I have my limits. Even I have my moments. This scandal of separating children from their parents at our southern border is one of those moments.

So on Wednesday, the first day of Annual Conference in Modesto, I took my lunch hour and drove to the UCC church to walk the one labyrinth in town. I wanted to use this psalm as a catharsis in the midst of this immigration crisis. So as I walked, I prayed, and in good midwestern fashion, I “sounded off” to God in silence. If you could only have heard what I was thinking about all the people who

were responsible for this horrendous policy, you would learn that even pastors have secrets that they can only share with God.

It's comforting to know that God can take it. God is not going to be angry with us for telling our truth, for God knows what's in our hearts anyway. God knows that we secretly want to take vengeance on our enemies, on the people who hurt other people. But to be more honest, what we really want is for God to do the dirty work for us. So we cry out, "Let my assailants be put to shame...may my accusers be clothed with dishonor...." But what God hears is not the hate but all the hurt that is buried in our angry words. When we ask God to take vengeance on our enemies, we are admitting that the hurt is too big for us. It's not until we realize that it's going to overwhelm us that we give it up to God.

It took the author of this psalm 20 verses, but he finally got it out of his system. By the time we get to the 22<sup>nd</sup> verse, the one who was accused of hounding the broken-hearted is finally willing to

admit to his own broken heart: “I am poor and needy, and my heart is pierced within me...Help me, O Lord...”

And if we are brave enough to go to that vulnerable place, that truthful place, and offer up our vengeance to God, what happens? What happens when we confess our ugly anger and pray this psalm as if we owned it? God takes all that anger in. God’s divine essence absorbs it, and then transforms it into love.

I’ve seen it happen in people’s lives. At Annual Conference this year, one of the Bishop’s awards for faithful service went to a former parishioner of mine, Pat Ravicz. Growing up, Kristen called her Pat Rabbit. Everyone else just called her the angel of Novato. A former nurse, disaster worker, Habit for Humanity volunteer, VIM team member, parish visitor, senior independent living advocate. You name it, she’s done it. Pat is one of the most selfless people I have ever met. You could say her life is a love song. But it didn’t start out that way. Pat told me that she did not feel loved as a child. Quite the opposite. She felt unwanted and in the way. But as scarred as

she was coming out of adolescence, by the grace of God, none of that hurt turned to hate. She managed to give it to God and God turned it into love. And like the Energizer Bunny, Pat's love just keeps on going and going and going.

If this can happen for individuals, and I've seen it happen many times, can it also happen for groups of people? For whole societies? For this country? Ironically, it happened on Facebook this past week. Charlotte and Dave Willner, a couple of early Facebook employees who are still living and working in Silicon Valley, saw the pictures of crying children at the border and wanted to do something about it.

Now they could have used their social media accounts to troll the administration. They could have added even more hate speech to a worldwide web of vengeance. And who knows? They could actually have provoked some lost soul to violence. Instead, they took the hurt and the hate and tried to think of a way to turn it into love. So they created a Facebook page to raise money for a small nonprofit in Texas that helps immigrant families. The Administration

had cut their funding So the Willners set out to raise \$1500 for the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services. That was just enough to pay a lawyer to file the paperwork to reunite one family.

As you may already know, their request went viral a week ago yesterday. Last Sunday, donations were coming in at the rate of \$40,000 per hour. At one point on Monday, it was \$3,000 per minute. Last I heard, they had raised over \$19 million. That's enough to turn a lot of hurt into love.

You may remember that in several places in the Bible, God says, "Vengeance is mine" [Deut 32:35; Rom 12:19; Heb 10:30] not because God likes to get angry at us and punish us, but because God wants to take that hate away from us and turn it into something that can actually help us. That's what God did last week in Texas. And when you think about it, isn't that what Jesus did for us on the cross? Didn't he take our anger and turn it into love? Didn't he take the vengeance directed at him and turn it into



forgiveness? Didn't he take all that energy that we have put into destroying the world and convert it into a power strong enough to save the world?

Isn't it amazing? God takes all of our garbage and turns it into grace. So I encourage you to use the psalms as your daily diary and don't skip all those verses of vengeance. Use them to help you write your own transformation story. Put all of your terrible, horrible, no good secrets in this faith book rather than spew them on Facebook. While you read and pray the psalms, give to God all of your unkind, spiteful, vengeful feelings. Then just watch God's grace go viral. That's one secret we just can't keep: "Of for a thousand tongues to sing our great Redeemer's praise. The glories of our God and King, the triumphs of his grace."

