Let the redeemed pray the Psalms (Lent 4B) (*Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22*)

Reading Psalm 107 aloud, what's most striking are the calls for voice.

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Two years ago, I heard Kathleen Norris read her poetry, and I immediately got a copy of her much-loved book *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* and read it straight through.

I have since read the book three times and some portions many more, used it in a sermon, and discussed it with first-year college students in a class on reading, faith, and place. In the book, Norris tells of an abandoned faith resurrected in a small South Dakota town and in an ancient monastic liturgy that taught her to read, recite, hear, and know the Psalms deeply, beyond time, beyond herself.

This summary is not the one many readers would have written about this book. The Psalms, in all honesty, play a relatively small role in the book, and Norris has, in fact, written an entire book on them titled *The Psalms.* And yet, it is the glimpses into Norris's practice of the Psalms from *Dakota* that I take with me now into my own reading of these ancient poems. It is the aliveness, the energy of these glimpses that calls me back to the Psalms again and again.

In the most remarkable passage, the one I think about almost daily, Norris writes that the "Psalms, spoken aloud and left to resonate in the air around me, push me into new time and space . . . here time flows back and forth, in and out of both past and future, and I, too, am changed . . . the words spark like a welder's flame; they

keep flowing, like a current carrying me farther than I had intended to go."

Norris's Psalms are spoken. They resonate and push. They spark and flow. They carry and change. They are ancient words that make a new world with each reading and rereading. Norris's Psalms have become my Psalms, and they are alive and enlivening.

Norris is a more disciplined speaker of the Psalms than I am. She practices a liturgy that recites the Psalms daily, that fills the air with these ancient prayers, these poems, these sacred words, these human confessions of despair and proclamations of hope. But through her writing, I have discovered the powerful practice of psalm speaking, their "spark . . . carrying me farther than I had intended to go."

When I speak Psalm 107 aloud today, I am struck most by the calls for voice: "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. . . . They cried to the Lord in their trouble. . . . Tell of his deeds with songs of joy." The poet, anticipating Norris by thousands of years, insists on the "saying," the "crying," the "telling" of all God is and has done, of God's goodness, love, redemption, healing, and deliverance.

I was born into a faith community that honored the written text, and today I am a lover, teacher, and scholar of written words. But the Psalms are most alive on the lips and in the voice of poets like the ancient psalmist, like Norris, like me, and like you. What am I doing when I speak these words aloud?

I am praying. I am, in the words of Walter Brueggeman, "committing an act of hope." We are calling "into being what does not exist until it has been spoken," he writes in *Praying the Psalms*, a world rich with justice and mercy and goodness. We are calling out from the sickness, affliction, death, and distress of verses 17–19 to claim that, as he writes in *Spirituality of the Psalms*, "even in the darkness, there is One to address," there is One who hears.

Sometimes the affliction is more acute than God's goodness. The distress is more felt than God's deliverance. And yet, I speak the words aloud, joining the many who have called out before me, as an act of faith so that the promises of God may be so: "I give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever."