

Thank you for inviting me to preach, it's good to be here again. Like the last time I preached I brought my sermon illustration bag. What's inside. Let's see, here's a folding camping shovel. Why a shovel? It's because of an old story often told by preachers and motivational speakers called, "The Farmer and the Donkey."

A farmer had an old donkey that fell into a shallow abandoned well and began to bray loudly. The farmer heard his donkey brayed loudly, went looking for him and found him in the bottom of the well. The farmer thought about what to do and finally decided that since the donkey was old and the well needed to be filled in, he would just bury the donkey in the well. The farmer called his neighbors and asked them to bring their shovels and help him. So, they came and started shoveling dirt into the well. As the dirt hit the old donkey it didn't know to do so he just shook off the dirt. The donkey realized a pile of dirt was growing so he stepped up onto the pile of dirt that was forming. As shovel full, after shovel full of dirt hit him, he would shake it off and step up, shake it off and step up. Soon the well was almost full so the donkey stepped over the edge of the muddy well and trotted off. The scripture reading for this Sunday is Psalm 40, so listen to Psalm 40 verses 1-4:

I waited patiently for the Lord and he turned to me and heard my cry. He brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay. And he set my feet upon a rock making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see it and put their trust in him. Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord.

Here in Psalm 40, David finds himself in a pit, a muddy well. Why? We're not told, but we do know that David faced a lot of difficult circumstances in life and often felt like he was down in a pit. So, what did David do when he was down in a pit? He cried out to the Lord his God for help and then? Then, he waited patiently. Waiting. Waiting is hard for all of us. We don't like to wait. When I'm driving and I have a green light I always hope it won't turn red before I get there. Why? I don't like to wait. But David cried out to the Lord then waited patiently. Why could he wait patiently? I like what David says in Psalm 131:2

I have calmed and quieted myself. Like a weaned child with its mother. When babies are little, they cry when they are hungry. When a loving parent hears their cry, the parent doesn't wait but goes to their baby and feeds them as soon as they cry. Babies can't wait. But later when a child is older and asks for something to eat, a loving often parent says, "Just wait, dinner will be ready soon.", it's not easy but a child can quietly wait. Why? It's because the child has learned to trust his or her parent, and knows they will keep their promise and feed them so they can wait.

David cried out then waited patiently for the Lord to answer him, because he had learned to trust the Lord. David knew from experience that the Lord would hear his cry and answer him so he could wait patiently. What happened? The Lord didn't ignore David. The Lord stopped what he was doing and turned to look at David. The Lord didn't say "don't bother me I'm busy," the Lord heard his cry and went to work. The Lord brought David out of the pit, out of the muddy well that was in. How?

That's a good question? Did the Lord get out his shovel of sovereignty, start throwing the dirt of circumstances on him and say, "This is my will, David, so just shake it off and step up"? When we're down a pit of problems and trouble in life, does Jesus our Savior and Lord shovel the dirt of more problems on us and say, "It's my will just shake it off and step up"? Sometimes it feels that way, doesn't it? But that's not what the Lord does when we're in a pit, we're not his donkeys, we're his children. So, what does he do? What did he do for David? How did he get

David out of the pit?

David says, “He, the Lord, lifted me out of the pit. David didn’t shake it off and step up and eventually crawl out of the pit on his own. The Lord lifted David out of the pit. How? I have something else in my bag. I brought some rope. When the prophet Jeremiah was thrown in a muddy well and his friends rescued him, they threw down ropes and old ragged clothes. They told him to put the ragged clothes under his arms to pad the ropes then pulled him out of the pit. Jeremiah was lifted out with rope.

Is that how Lord lifted David out of the pit? Did the Lord throw down a rope, say, “hang on, I’ll pull you out?” I don’t think so. I believe the Lord God did something else and I know he does the same for us when we are down in a pit and cry for help. How do I know? Because I’ve been there. I’ve been down in the pit, I’ve cried for help, Jesus my Savior and Lord has lifted me out of the pit. How? 2 Corinthians 1: 3&4 tell us.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Compassion the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all of our troubles.

I love this verse, why? It’s because it tells us who Jesus is and what he does when we’re down in a muddy pit of trouble. Who is Jesus? He is the father of compassion. What is compassion? It means to love and to care about someone. Compassion means to understand and to feel with them. Jesus is the father of compassion, that means that compassion comes from him. Jesus loves and cares about us. Jesus understands how it feels to be down in a pit or a muddy well. Psalm 40 is called a messianic psalm for it describes what Jesus went through not just on the cross but in all of life when he became human like us. Jesus experienced all the joys, sadness, pain, loss, grief, hurt and rejection we experience in life. Isaiah says he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Jesus knows what it is like to live in this less than perfect fallen world of sin. Jesus loves and cares about us when we’re down in a pit. so what does he do? He comforts us. How?

The word translated comfort here in verse 3 is a beautiful word. I love it because it means to come alongside and help. When I started using a walker a friend suggested that I name my walker, so I named it Barney, which is short for Barnabas in the book of Acts. The name Barnabas means son of comfort, the same word here in verse 3. Barnabas was the one who came alongside of people to help them. Barney, my walker comes alongside of me to help me and keep me from falling.

So, what does Jesus do when we are down in a pit or a muddy well? He doesn’t shovel the dirt of difficult circumstance on us and say, “Shake it off and step up”, nor does he throw us a rope and say “hang on I’ll pull you out.” What does Jesus do? He gets down in the pit, the muddy well with us, and gets muddy with us. Then he lifts us up, he carries us out of the horrible pit out of the muddy well. Do you see the greatness of Jesus our Savior and Lord. He is willing to get down in the muddy pit with us to carry us out of the pit. He’s willing to get his feet muddy.

But that’s not all Jesus does. There’s more. What’s the more? It’s the rest of verse 4
 who comforts us in all of our trouble and here it is, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

We all know what it’s like to be down in the pit, the muddy well of trouble and problems in life. Jesus comes down into the pit to be alongside of us and carry us out of the pit. Then Jesus calls us to crawl down in the pit others to come alongside of them to comfort, help, love care and encourage others. He calls us to get our feet muddy.

A year ago, in December of 2021 we had a 95-mph wind storm here in Hillsboro, and a huge branch fell across a cable in our back yard. I thought I was still 50, so I got out my hand saw and started cutting the branch. What happened? I had a heart attack, passed out, fell backwards and severely injured my right leg. I ended up spending two weeks in the hospital followed by three months of therapy and health care at home as I learned to walk again. I was down in a pit of sickness and pain, I was hurting and discouraged. Peggy was in a pit of concern and all work to care for me. A couple of days after I came home from the hospital, one of the deacons called Peggy. She asked Peggy if she could arrange for people to bring us meals. Peggy said yes and friends from our age Sunday school class and church came alongside of us to help us by bringing meals for over a week. But that's not all they did. I was staying downstairs in our family room and couldn't get up the stairs so they came down to sit alongside of us to visit, comfort, encourage and pray for us. The food was great but the love, care, concern, comfort and prayer helped lift us out of the pit.

When people are hurting and are down in a pit of sorrow, sickness, sadness, grief, hurt and pain, we are not called to use a shovel of God's sovereignty and say, "It's God's will, so shake it off and step up." We don't know what God's will is for others, We're not even called to throw a rope down and say, "Everything has a purpose." Jesus calls us to crawl down in the pit to come alongside of others to love, care, comfort and encourage them and help them out of the pit. Jesus calls us to get down in the pit and get our feet muddy.

Over the years Peggy and I have experienced many pits and muddy wells. We been in the muddy pits of sickness, sadness, sorrow, pain, hurt, grief, and loss. We have cried out to the Lord and he has heard us. He has come down into the pits we've faced to be with us and lift us up out of the pit. He has sent others to come alongside of us to help, love, care, comfort and encourage us when we been down in the pits and muddy wells of trouble. He has placed our feet on a rock, the rock of knowing we can put our trust in Jesus our savior and lord to keep his promise not to keep us from trouble but to take us through trouble. And we praise him, Jesus has never failed us yet and we know he won't.

Pits are muddy and deep but Jesus gets down in our pit with us to lift us up and set our feet on a rock of trust. Yes, it takes time, we don't always understand why we had to be in the pit. But we know that Jesus gets down in the pit with us to lift us up.

Do you feel like you're down in muddy pit in your life right now? Cry out to Jesus, he will hear your cry and crawl down into the muddy pit with you and come alongside of you, to love, care and comfort you and to lift you out. Jesus loves you so much he gets his feet muddy.

Do you know someone who is down in a muddy pit. Get down in the pit with them. Go to them, listen to them, comfort them, encourage them, pray for them, be with them. Get your feet muddy.

Gaylord L Goertzen

"Muddy Feet"

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First Mennonite Church

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