

Christ Episcopal Church, Valdosta

“Turn to Me” (Psalm 86:16)

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Dave Johnson

In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

When I was a freshman in college Pink Floyd released their 1987 album *A Momentary Lapse of Reason*, which included a powerful song called “On the Turning Away” in which David Gilmore sings:

On the turning away from the pale and downtrodden
And the words they say which we won't understand
Don't accept that what's happening is just a case of others' suffering
Or you'll find that you're joining in the turning away

Later, following one David Gilmore's signature guitar solos, are the final verses:

No more turning away from the weak and the weary
No more turning away from the coldness inside
Just a world that we all must share
It's not enough just to stand and stare
Is it only a dream that there'll be no more turning away?

And then comes another epic David Gilmore guitar solo, second in my opinion only to the one he plays in “Comfortably Numb”, but I digress.

Today I am preaching on just one phrase from Psalm 86, “Turn to me.” Psalm 86 is attributed to King David, and like many other psalms, is a cry for help from God in the midst of people or circumstances that are utterly overwhelming. Psalm 86 begins, “Bow down your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and in misery” (Psalm 86:1, *BCP* 709). Later David says why he is crying to God for help, “the arrogant rise up against me, O God, and a band of violent men seeks my life; they have not set you before their eyes” (Psalm 86:14, *BCP* 711). And then David describes the demeanor of God, which of course is the polar opposite of his enemies, “But you, O Lord, are gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and full of kindness and truth” (Psalm 86:15, *BCP* 711). And based on who God is, David continues by praying, “Turn to me” (Psalm 86:16, *BCP* 711).

“Turn to me”—that simple prayer is what I am preaching on today—“turn to me.”

In the popular television competition show *The Voice* contestants compete to win a \$100,000 and a record contract. They begin by singing not just to the studio audience but more importantly to four judges, each of whom is seated in chairs with their back to the singer. The singer sings their heart out and only if a judge decides they would like to coach that contestant do they turn their chair toward the singer—and as they do so a sign beneath their chair lights up and reads, “I want you.” Sometimes all four judges turn to the singer, sometimes just one or two of them do, and sadly, even if the audience is yelling for the judges to turn to the contestant, sometimes none of the judges turn and the singer continues to sing their heart out until the time runs out only to then walk off the stage alone because none of the judges wanted them.

I am now going to juxtapose scenes from two classic films: *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971) and *Pretty in Pink* (1986). (And yes, I can guarantee you there has never been another sermon ever preached with illustrations from *Pretty in Pink*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and Pink Floyd in the same sermon, so apparently it’s your lucky day). The first has a heartbreaking scene of someone *turning away* from another, and the second had a heart healing scene of someone *turning to* them.

In the acclaimed 1971 film *Fiddler on the Roof*, which was based on the hugely popular Broadway musical, Tevye is a middle aged father of several children. It is the turn of the twentieth century in Russia, a time of vast social and political turmoil, and many are being forced to leave their homes, including Tevye and his family. Tevye’s favorite daughter, Chavaleh, against his wishes, elopes with someone of whom he does not approve, and essentially disowns her. Very late in the film Chavaleh finds her father working alone, pushing a cart in a field, and calls out to him, “Papa? Papa?”

Tevye turns to her. “Papa, I’ve been looking everywhere for you.” He does not say a word, but turns away from her, picks up the handles of the cart, and resumes pushing it, each step moving farther and farther away from his daughter. “Papa, stop!” she cries, but he shakes his head and keeps walking away. “At least listen to me,” she implores. He shakes his head again and keeps walking away. “Papa? I beg you to accept us.”

Tevye steps away and thinks to himself, “Accept them? How can I accept them? Can I deny everything I believe in? On the other hand, can I deny my own daughter? On the other hand, how can I turn my back on my faith, my people? If I try to bend that far, I’ll break. On the other hand...no, there is no other hand!” He walks back his cart and waving his arms yells, “No Chavaleh! No, no!” “But Papa,” Chavaleh cries, “Papa!” But Tevye keeps shaking his head as he pushes the cart away, leaving Chavaleh standing all alone, dissolved in tears. It is an absolutely devastating scene. That is what *turning away* from someone looks like.

In John Hughes’ hit mid 80’s “Brat Pack” film *Pretty in Pink*, one of the main characters is Philip, affectionately known as Duckie, who has been a longtime faithful friend to redheaded beauty Andie. At the end of the film Duckie takes Andie, who has recently been rejected by her boyfriend Blane, to the senior prom. To their surprise Blane humbly walks up to them, “Hi.” “Hi,” Andie replies, her face flushed with embarrassment and hurt. Blane reaches out to shake hands with Duckie, who is beyond annoyed but eventually shakes his hand.

Blane then turns to Andie, “You don’t need me to say I’m sorry.” “It’s done,” Andie replies, “It’s over with, I’m fine” (of course Andie is lying because she wasn’t fine at all—and perhaps you have done the same thing before). “Oh, well if that’s true, I’m glad,” Blane replies. There’s an awkward pause, then Andie admits, “It’s not true, but it doesn’t matter, does it?” Blane continues, “You told me you couldn’t believe in somebody who didn’t believe in you. Well I believed in you, I always believed in you. I just didn’t believe in me.” Then Blane gently tells her, “I love you,” softly kisses her cheek and whispers, “always”, and walks out of the prom. Duckie sees the longing on Andie’s face and says, “If you don’t go to him now, I’m never gonna take you to another prom ever again, you hear me? This is an incredibly romantic moment and you’re ruining it for me.” Andie grins and hugs him, “Thanks, Duckie” and leaves to find Blane.

So now Duckie is standing by himself at the senior prom. But to his pleasant surprise, a stunning blonde turns to him, smiling invitingly. Duckie can’t believe it. He looks around to see if she’s really looking at someone else, and then looks back at her, and points to himself, “Me?” She keeps smiling and nods her head. Then Duckie looks at the audience, in a so called “breaking the fourth wall” moment and walks toward her. That’s what *turning to* someone looks like.

I would guess every single one of you can relate to both of those film scenes, that right this very moment, you can recall both a heartbreaking moment when someone turned away from you and a heart healing moment when someone turned to you. Or perhaps you have had moments in your life where metaphorically you have been singing your heart out to those who have their backs to you, hoping they will turn their chair around, hoping they will turn to you because they want you.

In Psalm 86 David prays to God, “Turn to me.” And God does turn to David. God had always turned to David, even when he, like Chavaleh in *Fiddler on the Roof*, had his own father turn away from him. Just as Duckie, standing alone at the senior prom in *Pretty in Pink*, was surprised when a gorgeous girl turned to him, David the shepherd alone in the fields, had been surprised when God turned to him and had him anointed as the next King of Israel. As David sang his heart out to God, “turn to me...turn to me”, God did just that because God wanted David.

And God wants you too. God never turns away from you; rather, God always turns to you. That is the heart healing gospel for the broken hearted.

Throughout his earthly ministry Jesus continually turned to those who were used to others turning away from them: lepers and notorious sinners and tax collectors and beggars and pariahs whose personal lives were a train wreck. With Jesus there was “no turning away from the pale and downtrodden.” With Jesus there was “no more turning away from the weak and the weary.” Jesus never turned away from them.

And yet during his passion and death, as David wrote in Psalm 86, the arrogant rose up against Jesus and “a band of violent men” sought his life. As Jesus sang his heart out to a judging world that continually turned away from him, none of the judges turned their chairs to him because nobody wanted him. But Jesus sang his heart out anyway, all the way till his time ran out and he breathed his final breath, because as David also wrote in Psalm 86, God is indeed “gracious and full of compassion,” because God is indeed “full of kindness and truth.”

In other words, when it comes to your prayer to God, “Turn to me,” God has already answered it in Jesus Christ. You see, the actual Judge in the chair is your Savior, who has always turned to you, and still does.

Amen.