

Hammer and Tongs

Proper 17A, Track II — Psalm 26 • Jeremiah 15:15-21 • Romans 12:9-21 • Matthew 16:21-28
 Rite I • Trinidad and Tobago Independence • Sunday, August 30, 2026
 The Rev. Robert J. Goodridge • Holy Faith Episcopal Church



There's a conversation you've had...
 when no one else was in the room.
 You know the one.
 You're in the car... or the shower...
 or lying awake at two in the morning...
 and you... ***are explaining yourself.***
Beautifully.
 You have never been more articulate in your life.
 Every point lands.
 And the person who wronged you... ***finally... finally... understands.***
 Except... ***they are not there.***
 They *never heard a word* of it. You're just...
Standing in the shower... Water turning cold... Winning.
 We ***all*** want to be **cleared.**
 Not ***forgiven***... **cleared.**
 We want somebody... with *authority*...
 to look at *the whole record*... and say:
He was right.
She was telling the truth.
It happened exactly as you said it happened.

You know the expression... ***Hammer and Tongs.***
Going at it hammer and tongs
 Full force. All out. Focused. Not letting go.

That's a man in a shower at two in the morning, making his case.
 But that ***phrase... comes out of a forge.***
 And in a forge... ***you... are not the one swinging.***

The hammer and the tongs... are what gets *used on **the iron***. The hammer... *changes its shape*.

And the tongs... *the tongs hold it still*.

Because hot metal will not stay in the fire on its own.

Hang onto that. you're going to need it...

So when Psalm 26 begins...

*we recognize the voice **immediately**.*

Clear my name, Lord. I've walked with integrity.

And then... *he keeps going...* and it gets **worse**.

I don't sit with liars. ***I*** don't hang around with hypocrites.

I hate meeting of the wicked... ***I won't*** sit at *their table*.

Honestly?

On first hearing... this guy's **insufferable**.

He submitted **his own** letter of reference.

He came before God... *with a **résumé***.

But listen to what he said... One. Breath. Later.

Listen **closely**... because **everything turns**... *right here*.

Test me, Lord.

Try me.

Put my heart and mind through the fire.

Those are *entirely different* requests.

"Clear my name" asks for a verdict.

"Put me through the fire" asks for a furnace.

One man wants to be told... *you're fine*.

The other man... *hands over the keys*.

And the Hebrew underneath that second one
is not a courtroom word at all.

It's **a blacksmith's** word.

It belongs to **the forge... to fire, and hammer, and tongs**.

Which means our psalmist... has just changed...
which end of the hammer he's on.

Clear my name asks God to agree with him.
Put me through the fire asks God to pick up the tongs.

There is a popular instrument... everyone in this room...
 Knows... and loves... The Steel Drum.



But what a lot of folks don't know...
 Is that beautiful sound of the islands...
 Didn't begin its life as a revered musical instrument.
 It began... as trash.
 A lot of people think... Making a steel drum
 Means finding an old steel 55-gallon oil drum...
 Cut it down... and *make music... but NO!*
 The *real story* is *harder*... and *better*...
 and some of you have known it *for your whole lives*.
Not me... I had to *look it up!* And what I learned... *amazing!*

In 1881... and again in 1884...
 after the canBOOlay Canboulay riots...
 the British colonial authorities in Trinidad... *banned the drums*.
 Not *discouraged*... *banned*.
 Percussion... was *outlawed*...
 because *the sound of it*... *frightened* the people in charge.

So the people cut bamboo.
 Different lengths, different pitches, struck against the ground... *tamboo bamboo*...
 from *tambour*... the *French word* for *drum*.
 And they made *Carnival* out of it *for fifty years*.

By the 1930s, that was banned too.

So they picked up biscuit tins... Trash can lids...
 Whatever the island *threw away*...
 They ***hit*** it... and *listened to what it said back*.

And then came the Second World War...
 and American Military bases...
 and *stacked up **behind*** those bases...
 empty... fifty-five-gallon... steel... oil drums.

By 1947...
 Men in Trinidad were building ***full melody pans*** out of them.

And 75 years ago... in 1951...
 a Steelband... made entirely of oil drums...
 was sent to England... to the Festival of Britain.

Full Circle...
The empire that outlawed the drum...
sent for the drum.
Asked... please... come and play.

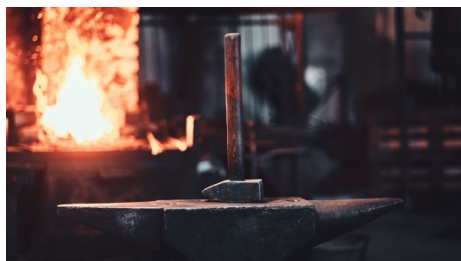
Eleven years later:
Trinidad and Tobago became an independent nation.

And the men who built it? *Not respectable*...
 Society called them *outcasts*... and they knew it...
 and they took the names they'd been given...
 and painted them on the side of the band.
Desperadoes... Invaders... Renegades...

Most of you know... Eslon Attwood is from Trinidad.
 So I asked her if ***she*** played Steedrum...
 Well, She doesn't come from a pan family.
 She never played, and didn't really know anyone who played.
 But she did tell me about the young people playing.
 Big bands. Children by the dozen... learning it...
 playing in front of enormous crowds.

The instrument they outlawed three times over...
 is the one the children are now lining up to learn.

That's what vindication actually looks like.
 It isn't a verdict.
 It's the next generation.



Here's the part I want you to hold onto.
 Ask a tuner how a pan is made...
 and he'll tell you... it *starts* with a **sledgehammer**.
 You **sink** the face of that drum... you **beat** it in
 You don't *gently persuade* it.
 Then you mark out where the notes are going to live
 and you groove them in with hammer and punch.
 Then... you put it **in the fire**.
 Then you let it cool... You **temper** it.
 Tongs hold it in the fire... the hammer shapes it... and it cools
 Over and over and over until it's tempered.
 Heated... then cooled... it's strong but never brittle

And then... **you tune it**
 which means...
 You strike one note and listen...
 Strike it again... and listen
 And again... And again...
sometimes for hours on a single note
 until it **stops being noise** and **becomes a note... in perfect pitch**
The pan sings because it was beaten.
 That is **not** a poetic flourish.
That's the manufacturing process.

Test me. Try me. Put my heart and mind through the fire.

The psalmist asked God... To do the same thing to him...
 that a pan tuner does... Beat a discarded piece of metal
 Then run it through the fire... create something truly valuable

Test me. Try me. Put my heart and mind through the fire

Now *that...* is a *dangerous* prayer...

Jeremiah prayed a version of Psalm 26...

and meant every syllable.

Listen to what he said to us him this morning:

I did not sit with the merry-makers.

I sat alone. I ate your words.

Same posture. Same résumé.

I don't hang around with hypocrites.

But in Jeremiah's mouth... ***it curdles.***

Why is my pain unceasing?

And then he turns to God and says:

You are like a stream that dried up.

A brook that lies.

He calls God a dry creek bed.

And God does not comfort him. Not at first.

What God does say is...

If you turn back... I will take you back.

***Separate what is precious from what is worthless
and you will be my mouth.***

Precious from worthless. Hammer and Tong.

The man who was *certain* he was ***the last faithful one left...***

Is told — ***gently and firmly*** — ***he needs the fire too.***

Which brings us back to Peter,
who was standing right here last Sunday.

Last Sunday Peter got it exactly right.

You are the Messiah. And Jesus said: on this rock.

Six verses later... six...

Jesus turns around and says...

Get behind me, Satan.

**You are a stumbling block.
You're thinking like a man and not like God.**

Same man. Same conversation. The Rock to a rock-in-the-road.
And then... *immediately. To everyone listening:*
***if any want to follow me,
let them deny themselves and take up their cross.***

*The pan sings because it was beaten.
The Christ we follow is glorified because he was crucified.*

There is no version of this faith
where the metal gets to skip the hammer.

So what do we do with “*Clear my name*”?
Paul answered it in Romans this morning...
and he opens with a ***word worth catching.***
Let love be genuine... he writes...
In the Greek... it is literally: ***without a mask on.***

Our psalmist said... ***I don't hang around with hypocrites.***
Paul says: **Good. Now stop being one.**

But then he takes the verdict out of our hands... *entirely.*

***Bless those who persecute you.
Don't repay evil for evil.
Never avenge yourselves.***
Which is to say:
***You asked to be cleared.
Let that go.
Leave the clearing to God...
Now go get into the fire.***

There's another ***beautiful moment*** on this *particular* morning.
In a few minutes... Fr. Bill is going to stand at that altar...
To consecrate bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus
but before *any of us receives anything*

we are going to pray *in the oldest English* this church has:

***We do not presume to come to this thy Table...
O merciful Lord... Trusting in our own righteousness...
But in thy manifold and great mercies.***

*That's Psalm 26... finishing its own sentence.
Three thousand years later
in a small church in Port St. Lucie
right out of our very own mouths.*

You'll also see Fr. Bill wash his hands at that altar.
Our psalmist wrote that down too.
I wash my hands in innocence and walk around your altar Lord.

We have been doing what this psalm describes for so long... We forgot it was actually... a quotation.



Now here... is where the psalm brings it all home

***Lord, I love the house where you live
the place where your glory stays.***

That is what he wanted the whole time!
*He opened by asking to be declared right.
He ends by saying:
All I ever wanted... was to be where you are.
The furnace... was never the punishment.
The furnace was always... the way in.*

A drum that has never been struck can't play anything.

It's still just a barrel.

It's the *beating* that *gives* it a *voice*... and *it's the tuning*...
the patient striking and listening and striking again...
that turns a voice into music.

Trinidad knows this.

It made an instrument...

Out of something reviled... rejected... and banned...

It was called worthless three times over
and it uttered something precious anyway
and now the whole world plays it.

Our psalm ends with a line I haven't read to you yet.
It's the last thing our psalmist says

after the fire
and the washing
and the walking around the altar:

And in the great congregation I will bless the Lord.
And in the great congregation I will bless the Lord.
And in the great congregation I will bless the Lord.

Well. Here we are.

And so... we shall bless the Lord.

Bless the Lord with a new song.

I created just for our service here today...

The ancient words of Psalm 46...
and steel drums

