

MAY 14, 2021

Psalm 4: 1,4,7,8

Answer me when I call, O God of my right!

You gave me room when I was in distress.
Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer...

When you are disturbed, do not sin;
Ponder it on your beds, and be silent...

You have put gladness in my heart
More than when their grain and wine abound.

I will both lie down and sleep in peace;
For you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety.

Psalm 4, like many psalms, is a plea for deliverance from enemies. But this psalm, like every psalm, is also distinctive in how it expresses its pleas to God and how God is experienced in the answering.

The opening line lays out the context: The psalmist is seeking an answer from the “God of my right!”, meaning the God who vindicates and upholds one who has been wronged somehow. Have you ever been wronged? It is a universal experience, to be wronged. Even as others may have their own justifications for what has happened and what has been done, it is our experience of being wronged that lives in us, and if not engaged constructively somehow, festers within us breeding anger, bitterness, cynicism and despair.

This psalm provides some inspired guidance on a journey toward constructive engagement. What does “You gave me room when I was in distress” communicate to you? “Room” may suggest God has kept a distance, but perhaps even more so it may communicate room given to cry, to rage, to say things, wish things, fall down or escape for a while... and all that being ok because it is understood as part of a larger journey where any one emotion is but a part of a redemptive journey not the final resting place.

And what about: “When you are disturbed, do not sin; ponder it on your beds, and be silent”? All too often when we are disturbed we do sin with our thoughts and our words if not our actions, as we express ourselves hatefully and hurtfully out of our woundedness. Is the psalmist counselling an inner pondering in silence, before God and self, focusing on the source of the woundedness and a different path to healing than reacting hatefully and hurtfully?

And what about “You have put gladness in my heart more than when their grain and wine abound”? Who are “they”? Are they those who have wounded and wronged the psalmist? And what is this “gladness” having been poured into the psalmist’s heart? Clearly there’s some letting go and letting be happening, so that gladness can fill the space taken up by woundedness, resentment, anger and despair. Abounding in peace and love are now more important than abounding in grain and wine. They cannot hold that over against the psalmist as they once could have and perhaps did. Different things matter now, and gladness is not dependent on how well the psalmist does or fails to do over against the wounders.

And finally, “I will both lie down and sleep in peace; For you alone, O lord, make me lie down in safety.” The psalmist comes to a place of peace within. The wounders may have all the grain and wine abounding... They may have wronged the psalmist and wounded him with their taunts and putdowns, their accusations and dismissals... But all this has also led the psalmist into a deeper, prayerful journey with God... seeking deliverance through space to rage, cry out, run away, fall down and rise up again and again... to begin to reflect inwardly in silence the disturbance that expresses itself hatefully and hurtfully outwards... to experience a new gladness rising within that is not bound to outward success or failure... to a new space and place for peace to find a deeper home within the heart and soul...

All this journeying in one little psalm...

PRAYER: You know me, O God, and you know where I am on the journey... You know the wrongs I have suffered and how they live in me in ways I am aware and ways that flow through me beyond my awareness... You know the room I need, O God, to rage, to weep, to carry sadness and grief as long as it needs to be and to go... You know the disturbance I carry in my heart and sometimes through the night, and the silence which you also inhabit within me, that it may be part of a healing and growing in me... You know the gladness I am capable of tasting and living out of. Shower me with such gladness. Lead me into your peace, O God, and the kind of faith that feels safe in you no matter what threats may surround me... Amen.