

September 10, 2021

Psalm 29: selections

- ¹ Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
- ³ The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD, over mighty waters.
- ⁴ The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.
- ⁵ The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.
- ⁷ The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.
- ⁸ The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
- ¹⁰ The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD sits enthroned as king for ever.
- ¹¹ May the LORD give strength to the people!
May the LORD bless God's people with peace!

As we take in our news these days coming at us 24/7 from all over the world, what do we see? We see massive amounts of suffering. And where does this suffering come from? There is our personal human vulnerability to disease, death, hurt and loss. But there is also human conflict (think of Afghanistan right now) and natural disaster (think about Haiti and all the fires, floods and storms right now). Where is hope in the face of all this? How do we respond in the face of all this? Where is God in all this?

Prayer is often a last resort for many people, even those who claim to be people of faith. Why? Seeking God is something we do especially vigorously when we feel all our more practical options to do anything are futile. Prayer is a recognition that control is not in our hands all too often. It's a reminder that there are larger forces at play and they are unpredictable all too often.

Psalm 29 is a reminder that we are part of a world of greater natural forces that can all too often overwhelm and devastate our lives as vulnerable creatures that we are. The prayer of the psalm, however, is to a God who is above these natural forces. But is it possible that such a God also communicates to us through them? Usually massive rain which leads to flooding is also accompanied by thunder and lightening. What if we heard the thunder and lightening as: "God thundering" and "The Lord flashing forth flames of fire"? What if we saw God not absent in the face of flooding but "sitting enthroned over it"?

Well, Harris, are you and Psalm 29 suggesting that God is the cause of such disasters? Well, they are disasters to us and especially those of us whose lives are destroyed as a result. But what if we took this psalm at face value in terms of what it's saying. Does God speak to us through what is happening in our natural world?

Is God telling us that if we do not care for our natural world the way we care for a child or an elderly parent, our natural world, like our child or parent will suffer and even react? Is God also telling us through the fires and floods that destroying mother earth is destroying ourselves and the generations to come? God will not protect us from the consequences of our abusive and destructive behaviour even as God suffers with the victims and grieves our stubborn willfulness to a lifestyle that is unsustainable for mother earth. God hurts and God cries out through the destructive reactions of mother nature.

Perhaps if we begin listening to the voice of God in the fires and floods and open our hearts to the suffering of mother earth, the suffering of our human siblings caught in the fires and floods, and the anticipatory suffering of our children and grandchildren, we as God's images (Genesis 1) will begin thundering for our governments to make far more radical choices to change and reverse the ways we are collectively destroying our planet. Perhaps Psalm 29 was written especially for us today, especially for us today. What do you think?

PRAYER: Great mystery, you speak to us and call to us through all that lives. May we hear your voice. May our hearts open up ever more deeply in compassion for all your creation. May we come to understand all who suffer, including mother earth, as our fellow kin on this fragile planet. We're all in this together, O God, by your creative design. May we learn the lessons you have to teach us before it's too late. You believe in us. May we begin to believe in ourselves and what's possible when your energy flow of love creates new pathways in and through us; Amen.