

## PSALM 109: 1-5,21,29-31

- <sup>1</sup> Do not be silent, O God of my praise.  
<sup>2</sup> For wicked and deceitful mouths are opened against me,  
speaking against me with lying tongues.  
<sup>3</sup> They beset me with words of hate,  
and attack me without cause.  
<sup>4</sup> In return for my love they accuse me,  
even while I make prayer for them.  
<sup>5</sup> So they reward me evil for good,  
and hatred for my love.

<sup>21</sup> May you, O LORD my Lord,  
act on my behalf for your name's sake;  
because your steadfast love is good, deliver me.

<sup>29</sup> May my accusers be clothed with dishonour;  
may they be wrapped in their own shame as in a mantle.

<sup>30</sup> With my mouth I will give great thanks to the LORD;  
I will praise him in the midst of the throng.

<sup>31</sup> For he stands at the right hand of the needy,  
to save them from those who would condemn them to death.

Have you ever felt deeply wounded or betrayed by someone of whom you had high expectations of trust? Perhaps you entrusted them with your heart and you made yourself vulnerable by disclosing the struggles of your soul. Or perhaps, they were someone who you thought would always have your back no matter what. Or maybe they disappointed you by abandoning ship when you were in trouble or need. Or maybe they out-and-out turned on you with venom when you thought your friendship was rock-solid.

However it happens, part of the human experience is disappointment, if not all-out hurt, when individuals, groups or even communities turn on us. Perhaps it has happened when we have spoken truth from our hearts or raised concerns about some injustice. Perhaps it has happened when we have been in need after a difficult diagnosis requiring compassionate accompaniment, or perhaps after sharing about a struggle in a relationship we've needed some listening without judgement or distraction.

So how do we deal with all this? How do we heal? The psalmist is in deep. If you read the whole psalm, you can feel the profound woundedness, shock and even spite coming out. We cannot know the situation of the psalmist. Perhaps they are speaking about the situation of their people as a whole – the collective “I”. How much must the psalmist learn to let go? How much must the psalmist address and engage even if it has to get messy? Should they just lower their expectations, or should they demand some decent standards of treatment without compromise?

Whatever the journey of healing will include, already in the psalm there are some hints of where healing may come.

First of all, the psalmist prays to God. One would not pray unless one believed something good can come out of prayer. Prayer arises out of a faith and hope that justice, healing and peace can come. The psalmist believes in a God who is “steadfast love” and hence, the ground of all deliverance.

Second, though, the psalmist names what they hope the deliverance they are praying about should look like: “May my accusers be clothed with dishonour; may they be wrapped in their own shame...” How will this help the psalmist heal? It may give them a feeling that there is some justice in the world, and certainly, reading the whole psalm it is easy to feel the deep trauma of woundedness in the betrayal and the desire for gratification in some payback.

Third, though, the psalm ends with a refocus of energy toward praise and thanksgiving... praise and thanksgiving in a renewal of faith in God experienced as one who stands with the needy who are betrayed and downtrodden. The God of the bible is a God who does not remain neutral. God takes sides with the wounded.

But does God pay back? What happens if the psalmist accusers gets what’s coming to them? Is this an answer to prayer? Will this lead to healing? And what happens if they don’t get what’s coming to them? Has God failed to answer prayer? Is the psalmist bound by the hurt, unable to heal?

The lessons the psalmist must learn as we all must learn is that praise and thanksgiving cannot be conditional in the end. True healing in this world must involve a journey of letting go... Not letting go a fierce truth-telling, protest, resistance and action against injustice, no. But letting go what we cannot control. Outcomes happen one way or the other. We are worthy of more than hate or gloating or bitter satisfaction at the misfortune of those who deeply wound us. We are worthy of feeling loved steadfastly, through thick and thin, no matter what. And we are worthy of loving in return as we are loved by the ground of being we name God.

But is this enough? Especially in the face of so much injustice in the world without atonement? We as human beings rooted in love are called to build a world where justice must be demanded and supported. All of us must be held accountable to human dignity and care for all life. At the same time, Love demands we never sit in the space of bitter hate that can dehumanize and destroy those we hate as much as our own souls. God has no arms or legs. We are the hands, feet and heart of Jesus. But unless our hearts are constantly re-rooted toward praise and thanksgiving in the beauty of love, we will be swallowed up by the very injustices we cry out against.

PRAYER: Ground us again and again, O God, in your steadfast and indestructible love... Heal our woundedness... Heal us not by gratifying our desire for payback.... Heal us by granting us the power to rise above our bitterness, so that we let go again and again... Then, O God, begin to re-equip us with fresh energy to advocate for justice and share compassion... That's how we may heal... Amen.