

PSALM 122

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

¹ I was glad when they said to me,
'Let us go to the house of the LORD!'

² Our feet are standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem.

³ Jerusalem—built as a city
that is bound firmly together.

⁴ To it the tribes go up,
the tribes of the LORD,
as was decreed for Israel,

to give thanks to the name of the LORD.

⁵ For there the thrones for judgement were set up,
the thrones of the house of David.

⁶ Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
'May they prosper who love you.

⁷ Peace be within your walls,
and security within your towers.'

⁸ For the sake of my relatives and friends
I will say, 'Peace be within you.'

⁹ For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,
I will seek your good.

Unlike most every other psalm, this psalm is not addressed to God but to a city – Jerusalem. No doubt this psalm would be super special for Jewish people and for those in exile hoping and anticipating a return home. Jerusalem is the centre of their homeland.

But Jerusalem is also resonant with a sense of God's presence. Getting close to God and feeling safe in God's presence is also about a specific geographical location for the psalmist and their people. For some of us this may seem a strange idea, especially those of us who have moved to Canada from another place as immigrants or refugees, and those of us who have had to move from one place to another for family or work, and therefore, have less attachment to a particular geographical locale. But for some of us there are also those special places where we can feel connected to something larger than ourselves, places we can get grounded again, replenished again, find ourselves again and find God again.

What and where are those places for you? Is "Jerusalem" a city for you, a landscape, a mountain, a place somewhere at a cottage or somewhere in the world? Or is "Jerusalem" also a place like church or a community or a family or a particular person in your life? Or is Jerusalem any number of these places, spaces, relationships and more?

The irony about Jerusalem the place is that it has been anything but “safe” for residents there. From the promises made by God to Abraham, Sarah and their descendants, that the land would be a gift to them, to those escaping slavery in Egypt on an Exodus journey into what was then called Canaan, to the return of exiles from Babylon and Persia centuries later, to the Roman occupation in Jesus’ day another few centuries after, to violent conflict between Christians and Muslims for thousands of years, and now Palestinians and Jews, the “peace” of Jerusalem has been anything but secure. Praying for the peace of Jerusalem is as urgent now as it ever was.

And land, of course, is something contested in many places of the world, too. Think about Canada and the spaces we occupy as settlers. How did we acquire our little piece of land (those of us who have any to “possess”)? Did our ancestors acquire it fair and square from those Indigenous to the land who supposedly gave it away at a fair price? Is it as sacred to us as it has been and continues to be to indigenous people?

And yet, we continue to give thanks for places and spaces, and the people in it. For me, a physical space I’ve married into that is especially sacred is North of Toronto, on a lake near a town called Sundridge, on land originally inhabited by Anishinabek peoples. A year without some quality time in this place would be a spiritual absence that has come to be necessary to my inner being. But of course, for me there is also family, intimate relationships, and amazingly, the community we call Armour Heights. None of this can be taken for granted, I know, as all of this may be quite different for many of you. People can have deeply painful and wounded memories and relationships when it comes to any one of these things, and having a place to call home where we feel safe and grounded is not a given by any means. And yet, we all need to find those places, spaces and relationships through which we find ourselves and God and reconnect to some purpose and pathway on our journey toward greater wholeness. Where are those sacred places, spaces and relationships for you?

PRAYER: Thank you, O God, for visiting us through those special places, spaces and relationships in our lives. Thank you for the people who mediate something of your love and inspire in us faith and hope in its healing and restoring power. Thank you for being a source of peace for us as we seek to make peace with much in our lives and our world that is difficult and terrifying. May we feel your assurance that you are always with us and we are always with you no matter what; Amen.