

## PSALM 91: 1-7, 11-12

- <sup>1</sup> You who live in the shelter of the Most High,  
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,  
<sup>2</sup> will say to the LORD, 'My refuge and my fortress;  
my God, in whom I trust.'
- <sup>3</sup> For God will deliver you from the snare of the fowler  
and from the deadly pestilence;  
<sup>4</sup> God will cover you with God's pinions,  
and under God's wings you will find refuge;  
The Lord's faithfulness is a shield and buckler.  
<sup>5</sup> You will not fear the terror of the night,  
or the arrow that flies by day,  
<sup>6</sup> or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,  
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.
- <sup>7</sup> A thousand may fall at your side,  
ten thousand at your right hand,  
but it will not come near you.
- <sup>11</sup> For God will command God's angels concerning you  
to guard you in all your ways.  
<sup>12</sup> On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.

The words of this psalm may be familiar to some of you because there is a beautiful hymn that paraphrases it (#57 in our book of praise). Jesus also recites vs 11-12 in response to satanic temptations to doubt in the desert (Matthew 4:6). What I find so rich in this psalm is the metaphor and imagery for expressing a powerful faith, namely, that God will protect you whatever the threat may be. God will care for you and guide you whatever twists and turns life's journey may take you on. God will rescue you from whatever pit you may fall into.

God is like a "shelter" from any storm or threat. God's "shadow" is always over you, meaning God is always surrounding you. God is like a "refuge" you escape to for safety, and a "fortress" protecting you from outside threats seeking entry. God will deliver you from "the snare of the fowler" (one who sets traps for birds), and from the "deadly pestilence" (disease, plague, pandemic). There is the imagery of God as an eagle carrying you on great "pinions" and "wings" to safety. God is also imaged as a warrior with "shield" and "buckler" protecting you from fearful enemies and the "terror of the night." And then there is the reference to divine angels who will rescue you in the field of battle. Many will fall all around you but you will be sheltered and protected.

If anyone is looking for more faith through a difficult ordeal they are undergoing, this psalm provides rich, prayerful language and imagery to inspire it. But does it speak

truthfully? What happens if you do get attacked with pestilence or some other cruel injustice befalls you at the hands of people or the system? Has God chosen to be present as protector and deliverer for someone else and forgotten about you? What about all those in Ukraine who have lost family and home? Do we give up on faith or God, or do we assume some are chosen for special care and protection and some are not?

Here's where Jesus may help us. Scripture quotations on the lips of Jesus are often taken from the psalms. As mentioned above, Jesus quotes this psalm when he is undergoing assaults from "Satan." What were these assaults about? At the beginning of his mission, Jesus was trying to figure out his pathway forward. How would he fulfill God's purpose of love as Messiah by embodying it in the world? Would the people follow or would they reject him. Would the authorities be inspired by Satan or God in their response to such love? Would he find the courage, clarity, wisdom and resilience to fulfill his mission to the end wherever the path would lead? Jesus clearly anticipates difficulty, opposition and suffering. So, how did he understand a psalm like this one when on the surface the language is all about protection, safety and rescue? Would angelic messengers swoop down to save him from dashing his foot against a stone while thousands would fall all around him?

Clearly, Jesus did not read this psalm in a literal way. Rather, he was grounding himself in a higher power above him and within him who would accompany him through whatever pathway his ordeal would take him. Jesus would not be protected or rescued from trouble, suffering and eventually, a cruel death. But if the deeper meaning of this psalm is about fulfilling our mission as humans to embody God's will of love through our lives, to protect that mission and to rescue us when we fail and fall down because frustration, resentment, bitterness or despair have overtaken us (Satanic assaults), then this psalm is even more powerful a prayer than some superficial assumption that we will be protected while our neighbour down the street may not.

Life can be cruel and random, but God is not. God is that powerful flow of love energy which protects, heals, rescues and redeems, but not from physical harm or mental trauma. God empowers us and deepens us through all that we go through. The difference is how deeply we pray our way and open our hearts to that love energy flow when we are struggling. As it flows through us we live our ordeals and come through them quite differently than those without a God to pray to. That's the difference. Externally, we are no more protected than our neighbours. God within us, however, can build a fortress and refuge of powerful love moving through us and outwards as healing energy. It takes time to heal and to emerge creatively through our wounds and losses with deeper compassion

in our hearts. But we are also changed human beings. We become ever more than hands, feet and heart of the crucified, yet also risen Christ. What do you think?

**PRAYER:** Come to us O ruler and protector... Even as the universe flows in its own way, and we are all too often vulnerable creatures made of dust. We are also spirit, and with your Spirit passing through us we are grounded, protected, rescued and redeemed again and again as we pass through death to new life... May this become ever more our story as we live through our struggles and losses, O God. Do not abandon us. Come to us, move through us, reveal your powerful presence in us. In Jesus' name; Amen.