

PSALM 112

¹ Praise the LORD!

Happy are those who fear the LORD,
who greatly delight in God's commandments.

² Their descendants will be mighty in the land;
the generation of the upright will be blessed.

³ Wealth and riches are in their houses,
and their righteousness endures for ever.

⁴ They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright;
they are gracious, merciful, and righteous.

⁵ It is well with those who deal generously and lend,
who conduct their affairs with justice.

⁶ For the righteous will never be moved;
they will be remembered for ever.

⁷ They are not afraid of evil tidings;
their hearts are firm, secure in the LORD.

⁸ Their hearts are steady, they will not be afraid;
in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.

⁹ They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor;
their righteousness endures for ever;
their horn is exalted in honour.

¹⁰ The wicked see it and are angry;
they gnash their teeth and melt away;
the desire of the wicked comes to nothing.

What does your ideal world look like? Is it a world where justice is held up, vindicated and defended always, and injustice vanquished with the unjust held accountable? Is your ideal world one where the innocent are not terrorized, nor do they get sick, suffer or die before they're old and grey? Is your ideal world one where no one has to go to bed hungry, where everyone has a comfortable roof over their heads, where there is enough room for everyone and where everyone can feel safe? Is your ideal world one where everyone gets along and all differences are respected?

Psalms 112 paints such an ideal world. This world is one where the righteous are "happy" (fortunate or blessed) because they delight to observe God's commandments. They are rewarded with descendants, prosperity, and a land to call their own. They feel safe and protected and are not afraid of the wicked. Things will go their way. As for the wicked, they will falter and fall. And more than that, they will rage against the righteous in envy at their good fortune. It pays to be righteous. It costs to be wicked.

And what makes one righteous? Qualities mentioned in this psalm include graciousness and mercy, generosity to people, especially the poor, and a commitment to justice above all else. Such people deserve to be blessed.

OK, but what about the real world dear psalmist? You know as much as we do that things don't happen like this in the real world. Being righteous and being successful in the world don't necessarily come together all too often (despite what prosperity gospel preachers proclaim). The wicked do get ahead and many times do die old, gray and comfortable, surrounded by family and friends, despite their wickedness (or maybe because of it). And so, dear psalmist, what do you make of this all? What word from the Lord is there to speak to us who live in the real world?

Enter the book of Job, which is also in a part of the bible, like the psalms, called "wisdom literature". Job and his friends could easily have composed Psalm 112. But then, the book of Job is all about what happens to a very righteous man when he loses it all – family, friends, wealth and health. Does he remain a man of God when God seems to have abandoned him altogether?

The revelatory "wisdom" in Job and the journey of the psalmist is in discovering the value of righteousness despite the reality all too often we witness all around us and in the news. In the real world there is as much injustice as there is justice in the world, and there is as much opportunity for joy and thanksgiving as for sadness, outrage and grief. The biblical Job not only is disillusioned with his life and with God, but he rages at God, demanding accountability and justice. In the end, he finds a new intimacy with God, but not like before. Job discovers that the world is a place where much happens that is not in anyone's control. Life is vulnerable and sometimes fleeting. What makes it precious is love and the opportunity to celebrate whatever goodness is given as the gift it is. Justice is rewarded not only in its achievement, but it's pursuit even when it is frustrated. We become what we pursue and we grow into what we value. The fruit we bear around us is in the righteousness that becomes precious to us. We say "thank you" to all who offer us their heart-felt concern and compassion, and we build relationships of trust, care, laughter and joy with those around us.

This is the real world too, and it is the way God comes alive within and among us. Perhaps the psalmist must still make the journey of aligning his faith with the real world. Even as he may experience real heartbreak and loss and even as he may witness grave injustice, he may also savour ever more deeply the justice, goodness and love he does encounter and make his own. What about you?

PRAYER: We pray for justice, O God even when we don't always see it happen. We seek encouragement and inspiration to become righteous, even when we falter and fall all too often. We care about right and wrong, truthfulness over falsehood, and sacrifice over self-interest when it aims for a better world, regardless of whether the self-serving and greedy seem to get ahead of us. You do not impose yourself in this world of ours, O God. There is a free play of forces, and might often makes right regardless of what your love demands. May we embrace the way of love and absorb the costs that sometimes come with such an embrace. May we commit to the way of justice even when it seems like a losing proposition. We believe eternity is on the side of justice and love, and all will one day be accountable to it, even if it's not in this lifetime. Thank you for the gift of faith, hope and love you grant us, O God. Keep flowing into us for we need you every moment of every day. Amen.