

# PSALM 141

A Psalm of David.

<sup>1</sup> I call upon you, O LORD; come quickly to me;  
give ear to my voice when I call to you.

<sup>2</sup> Let my prayer be counted as incense before you,  
and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice.

<sup>3</sup> Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD;  
keep watch over the door of my lips.

<sup>4</sup> Do not turn my heart to any evil,  
to busy myself with wicked deeds  
in company with those who work iniquity;  
do not let me eat of their delicacies.

<sup>5</sup> Let the righteous strike me;  
let the faithful correct me.

Never let the oil of the wicked anoint my head,  
for my prayer is continually against their wicked deeds.

<sup>6</sup> When they are given over to those who shall condemn them,  
then they shall learn that my words were pleasant.

<sup>7</sup> Like a rock that one breaks apart and shatters on the land,  
so shall their bones be strewn at the mouth of Sheol.

<sup>8</sup> But my eyes are turned towards you, O GOD, my Lord;  
in you I seek refuge; do not leave me defenceless.

<sup>9</sup> Keep me from the trap that they have laid for me,  
and from the snares of evildoers.

<sup>10</sup> Let the wicked fall into their own nets,  
while I alone escape.

“Love the sinner, hate the sin.” I’ve heard this statement many times over the years. On the surface, it is declaring that every human creature is a child of God, but their behaviour, values and lifestyle often betray that identity. God created us all out of love and for love, but often, our lives reflect anti-love ways of thinking, relating and doing.

This statement was used in many a debate over the years within our denomination through our journey toward greater inclusion for lgbtqi+ siblings. It provides a way for those who are against inclusion to believe they are truly loving toward a queer person and only have their best interests in mind in wanting to isolate and separate their behaviour (which is sinful of course) from their identity as a child of God. But as we know, our sexual and gender identity is very much at the core of who we are and there is no easy separation. Either we embrace who we are in all our totality as a child of God or we reject it. The statement “Love the sinner, hate the

sin” feels like total rejection to a queer person. Declaring who they are as sin to be hated feels threatening. How can we share communion together when you have any measure of hate toward me? How can I have fellowship with you if you want me to live in a prison of accepting I am flawed and forced to refrain from expressing myself in my gender identity and sexuality?

There are at least two issues here that Psalm 141 may help us with. First of all, what is sin? What is evil? The psalm doesn’t tell us exactly. Rather it is a personal plea to God to protect the psalmist from being influenced or drawn in by evil doers. And how would that happen? We are influenced to imitate the bad behaviour of others, especially if we see that it benefits them. I have no doubt that many who defend and support someone like Donald Trump or Vladimir Putin, for example, will be influenced to behave that way with people around them because they feel greater permission to do so and perhaps it will improve their fortunes at the same time.

But also, the psalmist may be praying to God to protect them from getting drawn into the toxicity of evil because they are triggered to react and respond in kind. Tit for tat, retaliation and revenge all grow from being drawn in to hate, to hurt and to cause another to suffer who has hurt us. Perhaps the psalmist is afraid of what can happen to them should they be drawn in by the wicked. “And lead us not into temptation (which means: protect us from capitulating to it), but deliver us from evil (should we fall into it)” is the prayer Jesus taught.

Finally, this psalm is wonderful in its straightforward honesty. The psalmist does not use dishonest statements like “love the evildoer but hate their evil” as a way of continuing to condemn people while pretending to love them or deceiving themselves in believing they do. We should be honest about what is evil and what is good, what is sin and what is right. God is love and love is the measure of all that is beautiful, true and good. Evil and sin are thoughts, actions and attitudes that contradict love by dehumanizing others, disdaining them, using them, manipulating them and mistreating them. Let’s not complicate it more than we need to. Let’s be honest with ourselves and come before God for help to love better and love specific people better.

Of course there are people who do wicked things. Of course we need to love them while condemning their behaviour. Of course we need to protect the vulnerable and support the victims. But we should also ensure that people know that our effort to love them is sincere even when we must hold them accountable. We want to understand who they are and why they do what they do, while also protecting those who experience harm from them.

Clearly for us at Armour Heights, gender identity, expression and sexuality in all their diversity are gifts of God and means of enriching human relationships not harming them. Even as we do not know the specific kind of wickedness this psalm is condemning, our hope is that honest prayer to God for help against evil and help against being drawn into it may empower us to become better, more loving human beings. Our prayer is that we may discern those ways we

are dishonest with ourselves, others and God about how our thoughts, words and actions are not so loving, and when we do hold people accountable for sin, we do not use it as an excuse to further mistreat them.

PRAYER: Help us, O God, especially if we feel weak and failed in our loving... Protect us, O God from temptations to hurt and harm others because of what they've done, what they keep doing, or because our patience and tolerance have run out... Teach us to be honest with ourselves before you and honest with our hearts. When we struggle to love because we are afraid, or angry, or sad, may we come to you in search of healing and transformation rather than pretend because we don't want to face truth that is difficult and confronting. May we love ourselves because you love us, not because we have to persuade ourselves we are loveable. May we learn to love others so that they feel safe to be who they fully are with us... Amen.