

PSALM 55: selected verses

¹ Give ear to my prayer, O God;
do not hide yourself from my supplication.

⁴ My heart is in anguish within me,
the terrors of death have fallen upon me.

⁵ Fear and trembling come upon me,
and horror overwhelms me.

⁶ And I say, 'O that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest;

⁷ truly, I would flee far away;

I would lodge in the wilderness;

⁸ I would hurry to find a shelter for myself
from the raging wind and tempest.'

¹² It is not enemies who taunt me—
I could bear that;

it is not adversaries who deal insolently with me—
I could hide from them.

¹³ But it is you, my equal,

my companion, my familiar friend,

¹⁴ with whom I kept pleasant company;
we walked in the house of God with the throng.

²⁰ My companion laid hands on a friend
and violated a covenant with me.

²² Cast your burden on the LORD,
and God will sustain you;
God will never permit
the righteous to be moved.

Have you ever felt betrayed by someone you trusted... by someone who was supposed to be your friend? Maybe they disclosed something to others you shared with them in confidence. Maybe you exposed your vulnerability and it was taken advantage of. Maybe they turned their backs on you when you needed them most. But whatever the way it happens and has happened, betrayal is a painful human experience many of us have experienced in various ways.

The psalmist expresses some strong feelings: "My heart is in anguish within me... fear and trembling come upon me... O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest; truly I would flee away; I would lodge in the wilderness; I would hurry to find shelter for myself from the raging wind and tempest..." The psalmist wants to escape... Is it the embarrassment, humiliation or shock of being caught by total surprise that this could happen from one least expected?... The psalmist is clear that the betrayal of a

friend is much worse than the attack of an enemy: "It is not enemies who taunt me – I could bear that... It is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend, with whom I kept pleasant company..."

So what is it the psalmist praying for? Certainly the psalmist is praying for comfort and for easing of the pain and hurt. But if you read the whole psalm, the prayer is also for harm to befall the betrayer, even death. No doubt the harm of betrayal from a trusted friend has been bitterly painful and hurtful. But like many psalms, the preferred solution and resolution seems to include revenge. There is a desire to retaliate and to do to others as they have done to you. The kind of justice that recognizes the path to healing must include some forgiving and letting go, and even a genuine effort toward reconciliation under the right conditions, is little imagined, if at all.

Many things in life we cannot control or make as we want. There are injustices we will never experience sufficient atonement for. We cannot go back and reverse all too many things that have been done, even when the parties involved are more than willing. How do we learn acceptance, or at the very least, tolerance? How do we discern the difference between what we should fight to change and what we must learn to accept, and then live into those choices?

There is an art to living life fully, alive and at peace, and being alive at every moment and season requires fresh growth in the art of living well. What many psalms can teach us is that we cannot move forward if we are not honest with ourselves and others about the pain, the hurt, the rage, the sadness and the hopelessness. As we share and as we open our hearts to a God we are still trying to understand in order to image properly, we keep praying our way, even when some of our praying is difficult and dark and a working through of bitter thoughts.

PRAYER: Gracious God, sometimes we want you to be a weapon, a weapon of pain and hurt against those who have caused us pain and hurt. Sometimes we want you to be a weapon of making right all that is wrong, which often means plowing through those who stand in the way. We have bitter thoughts in our minds all too often, O God. If you are God and you exist, you know this. How do you continue to be steadfast in reaching out to us when we get messed up all too often and all too easily? We sway from rage to hopelessness, from oblivion to all the trouble around us, to sadness and sorrow that so much is wrong and broken... We swallow up others with our troubles even as we get swallowed up in the troubles of others... Find us, where we are, O God, and where we may be tomorrow... Awaken us... Challenge us... Comfort us... Give us the assurance that we are yours no matter how we fail and fall and how often... Amen.