

PSALM 85:

1-2,4,7,10-13

¹ LORD, you were favourable to your land;
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

² You forgave the iniquity of your people;
you pardoned all their sin.

⁴ Restore us again, O God of our salvation,
and put away your indignation towards us.

⁷ Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,
and grant us your salvation.

¹⁰ Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

¹¹ Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky.

¹² The LORD will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.

¹³ Righteousness will go before God,
and will make a path for the Holy One.

This psalm touches on a theme found in many of the biblical prophets also. The fate of the land and the fate of the people are linked to the peoples' relationship with God. The psalm is a prayer for the restoration of the land which will also lead to a restoration of the people who are dependent on the land to live. But such restoration is also dependent on the people being forgiven their sin (vs.1-2).

What sin is it that the people have committed to lead to the devastation of the land interpreted as a judgement from God? The psalm doesn't spell it out like the biblical prophets do. But how the land is treated and how people on the land are treated reflects the spiritual health or lack thereof of the people as a whole. When things were difficult, those poor and dependent on their land would be forced to sell their land to those who were better off, to survive. As this happened, the rich got richer by owning more of the land while the poor were forced to work the land for food without owning it, losing their independence. They got poorer, more desperate and more dependent. Biblical prophets allude to this as does the book of Genesis.

Such growing gaps between the prosperous and the poor, and such lack of compassion for neighbour is a feature of the "sin" of the people, their lack of "faithfulness" in response to God's "steadfast love. And so, they are condemned by the "righteousness/justice" of God, and therefore, find no "peace" on the land. Only as they

repent and are forgiven their iniquity and only as they embrace the righteousness/justice of God as shaping their social relationships going forward, will this also yield to a healthier relationship with the land.

Now while all this may seem more abstract to us today (i.e. how can moral behaviour toward other humans and faithfulness to God have a direct effect on the health of the land?), in our world today, we understand these relationships more clearly. Our treatment of mother earth reflects our treatment of all life on this planet. Greed is destructive and selfishness is deleterious to mother earth and to those humans more vulnerable and poor who inhabit mother earth. All creation suffers when those of us with the means function like autocrats rather than servants of a larger wholeness whom we name God. Our neighbour includes mother earth.

Finally, what also makes this psalm compelling and poetic is the use of moral metaphors to describe a healthy relationship of reconciliation between God, humans and the land. It's when "steadfast love" (God) and "faithfulness" (us) meet; "righteousness" (God) and the "peace" (our experience of it), kiss each other. And when this begins to happen, "faithfulness" will spring up from the ground (crops will grow) and "righteousness" (God) will look down from the sky (will bless the growing). Imagine thinking and experiencing God as steadfast love and righteousness rather than just some person-like figure somewhere out there in some place called heaven. And imagine our human experience of communion with God as a kiss of peace because we are practicing faithfulness to God's love in our renewed relationship with mother earth and her children.

May you experience the kiss of peace as you renew your commitment to justice in little ways and bigger ways in your life. And may you experience your heart filled with love as you renew your commitment to apply love in your relationships with all of God's creation.

PRAYER: Come to us, O God, and fill us with your steadfast love. May your righteousness which is justice provoke and inspire us in the commitments and concerns of our lives. May you renew our passion and purpose, in the little ways we connect with those around us and the little things we do that reflect our faithfulness to you. May we experience a deeper and richer peace in our lives even as the world around us may be in turmoil. Even as we carry the concerns of our world and of specific persons and situations because we care, may we also experience the fullness of your peace carrying us moment by moment and day by day. In Jesus' name we pray; Amen.