

Psalm 124

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

¹ If it had not been the LORD who was on our side
—let Israel now say—
² if it had not been the LORD who was on our side,
when our enemies attacked us,
³ then they would have swallowed us up alive,
when their anger was kindled against us;
⁴ then the flood would have swept us away,
the torrent would have gone over us;
⁵ then over us would have gone
the raging waters.

⁶ Blessed be the LORD,
who has not given us
as prey to their teeth.
⁷ We have escaped like a bird
from the snare of the fowlers;
the snare is broken,
and we have escaped.

⁸ Our help is in the name of the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

The experience of faith in God is the experience of how God in our lives makes a big difference in how we live through things and come out on the other side. The psalm ends as many other psalms begin, namely, with a bold declaration of faith: “Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” Our faith is not in some god of this or that, but in God who is the creative source of all life. And because God is the source of all life, God is everywhere present and active.

But how is God present and active? For the Hebrews, the constant reminder they rehearse is the founding story of their liberation from brutal and dehumanizing slavery in Egypt. One of the big moments in that liberation journey was the crossing of the Red Sea. The empire’s chariots with fully armoured warriors were on their heels. And somehow, the people were able to get across the sea without their “enemies... swallowing them up alive”, without the “flood” waters sweeping them away, and without the “torrent” or “raging waters” going over them. Somehow, they were able to escape “like a bird from the snare of the fowlers”, and from becoming “prey to their teeth.”

The beauty of a psalm like this, however, is that the imagery of being “swallowed up” by some enemy, or “flood”, “torrent”, or “raging waters” overwhelming us, or escaping like a bird the

“snare” set for us, is the kind of imagery that also gives us language for all kinds of situations and circumstances of our lives. What are those situations of your life, whether in the past, whether something that may come you anticipate, or something that is happening at this time of your life? How is it that you can feel overwhelmed by flood waters or snared like a bird in some trap? And how is it that freedom may come? Will part of that journey toward freedom include a rehearsing of liberation, empowerment and new capacities to overcome, to love, cope and let go that have developed in you as you have sought God’s healing, transforming and sustaining presence and flow? The Hebrews have their founding story. What is yours? Or maybe there are a series of stories over time, key points in your life or faith journey where something has shifted to open you up anew and empower you in a new way to faith, hope and love.

But there is also one more thing that makes this psalm compelling. Even as it is highly personal, it is also written to be recited collectively in worship. The worship leader begins the first line and then invites the people to join in reciting or singing the words together. When we are going through something alone, it’s very different than going through it with others. Rev. Ivan Rusyn, a pastor in Ukraine, speaks about how all Ukrainians now see themselves as family in the face of a massive enemy. The attack against them has brought them together in a common struggle, and this gives them both comfort in solidarity and empowerment to keep fighting tyranny rather than get overwhelmed by the flood waters or feel helplessly entrapped.

So, who are those people, groups or communities of support for you when you are going through the deep waters or face a significant threat in your life? May AHPC and God in Christ through the Holy Spirit flowing through this community provide a liberating and empowering connection for you?

PRAYER: Thank you, O God, for always opening up a way for us through the deep waters. Thank you for giving us strength and a way when we are feeling the threat of entrapment in our fears, anxieties and very real challenges. It does take time, sometimes, O God. Even as we know with our minds and our experiences of faith that you have been there for us and alongside us before to bring us through. But each time we are living what we are having to live, it feels altogether new and the threat seems greater than ever. Often, we don’t know if we have what it takes. Maybe we are weaker and more vulnerable than we were in earlier in life. Maybe we’re just more tired and worn. Or maybe, we need to experience a dimension of your redeeming power we have not known before. Reveal yourself to us anew, O God. Stick with us and don’t let us go, however long it takes us to find our way... In Jesus’ name; Amen.