

Psalm 74: 1-12,16-21

- ¹ O God, why do you cast us off for ever?
Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture?
- ² Remember your congregation, which you acquired long ago,
which you redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage.
Remember Mount Zion, where you came to dwell.
- ³ Direct your steps to the perpetual ruins;
the enemy has destroyed everything in the sanctuary.
- ⁴ Your foes have roared within your holy place;
they set up their emblems there.
- ⁵ At the upper entrance they hacked
the wooden trellis with axes.
- ⁶ And then, with hatchets and hammers,
they smashed all its carved work.
- ⁷ They set your sanctuary on fire;
they desecrated the dwelling-place of your name,
bringing it to the ground.
- ⁸ They said to themselves, 'We will utterly subdue them';
they burned all the meeting-places of God in the land.
- ⁹ We do not see our emblems;
there is no longer any prophet,
and there is no one among us who knows how long.
- ¹⁰ How long, O God, is the foe to scoff?
Is the enemy to revile your name for ever?
- ¹¹ Why do you hold back your hand;
why do you keep your hand in your bosom?
- ¹² Yet God my King is from of old,
working salvation in the earth.
- ¹⁶ Yours is the day, yours also the night;
you established the luminaries and the sun.
- ¹⁷ You have fixed all the bounds of the earth;
you made summer and winter.
- ¹⁸ Remember this, O LORD, how the enemy scoffs,
and an impious people reviles your name.
- ¹⁹ Do not deliver the soul of your dove to the wild animals;
do not forget the life of your poor for ever.
- ²⁰ Have regard for your covenant,
for the dark places of the land are full of the haunts of violence.
- ²¹ Do not let the downtrodden be put to shame;
let the poor and needy praise your name.

In this psalm we get a bit of an inside feel for the trauma of the Hebrews when they were attacked and subjugated by the Babylonians. Would this be the kind of psalm that would

resonate for indigenous people? What about the people of Ukraine? It's all about the land that was taken, the desecration of all the sacred and holy places, the utter destruction, violence and decimation of a people.

And yet, the psalmist has not given up faith. They are looking for hope. They are providing worshipful prayer language to their people. The appeal is to God to act. How is this appeal made? First, there is accusation against God: "O God, why do you cast us off forever? Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture?" The psalmist's worldview is of a universe supposedly in God's control as creator. Nothing should happen on God's watch God does not condone or permit, especially when it comes to God's people! What have they done that God is so angry, then, to allow this? How can allowing people to do such harm to other people serve God's glory? And, most critically, when will it all end, O God?! The appeal, here, is to God's justice.

Second, beyond the accusation there's an appeal to God's heart. All the sacred and holy places in the land have been desecrated and destroyed. This is an attack on God as much as it is an attack on the people's spiritual life and identity, intended to break their spirits. Also, God's people have now been rendered "poor" and "needy" while the enemy laughs at them and, ultimately, at their God. Surely, God must act if God cares!

Finally, there's an appeal to God's honour and pride: "Remember this, O Lord, how the enemy scoffs, and an impious people reviles your name..." How can God allow people, a bad people who are causing such harm, to dishonour God without some consequence? How can God permit people to cause such harm to other people without some accountability? How can God allow such injustice to happen in the world without those responsible having to answer for it? And when will those downtrodden become healed and restored?

Beyond answers, the psalmist is looking to change the situation. If God is a force in the universe, such prayerful supplication is intended to draw this force into action on behalf of justice, accountability and compassion. Like the biblical Job, the psalmist is laying it all out before God. They have not given up faith. They still pray and hope God will act. But now, the ball is in God's court.

PRAYER: Sometimes you seem far away, O God. There is much too much injustice in our world and much too much that is unfair in our lives and in the lives of people we know. Trouble doesn't fall evenly and too often those who deserve the least of it get it in spades while others seem so untouched regardless of their ethics. We'll keep praying to you, O God, hoping to experience the promised answer of your loving, comforting, healing and empowering presence. Give us the strength, the grace and the assurance that you will provide us the inner resources to be the hands, feet and heart of Jesus in our world... Come to us and all who suffer this day, O God... And come, especially, to all who are "poor" and "needy" right now like the people of Ukraine... Amen.