

# May 21, 2021

Psalm 6: 1-3,5-10

O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger,  
Or discipline me in your wrath.  
Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing.  
O Lord, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror.  
My soul is struck with terror,  
While you, O Lord – how long?...

For in death there is no remembrance of you;  
In Sheol who can give you praise?

I am weary with my moaning;  
Every night I flood my bed with tears...  
My eyes waste away because of grief;  
They grow weak because of all my foes.

Depart from me, all you workers of evil,  
For the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping.  
The Lord has heard my supplication;  
The Lord accepts my prayer.  
All my enemies shall be ashamed and struck with terror...

To languish is to suffer distress or anxiety. Languishing is a lack of flourishing. Languishing is a state of “stagnation and emptiness. It feels as if you’re muddling through your days, looking at your life through a foggy windshield.” This quote is taken from a recent NYTimes article, and the author declares that “languishing” might be the dominant state of being for 2021.

The bible translators of Psalm 6 use the word “languish” as the self-description of the psalmist. But what is the cause of the languishing? There is a lot of intense description of what languishing feels like for the psalmist: bone-shaking terror, moaning and weeping through the night, and a feeling of wasting away in grief...

While the translators of the psalm have given the following heading to it – “Prayer for Recovery from Grave Illness”, I am not so sure this is accurate. While there is no doubt a physical manifestation of the languishing, in my reading there are two causes of it

that are not illness in the typical biological sense. First, there are enemies and foes, “workers of evil.” Is the psalmist’s grief because they have taken something away, robbed the psalmist of his/her/their dignity, a loved one, land or something else precious to him/her/them? We’re not told.

But there is another reason that is causing the psalmist to languish, and this second reason may be an even greater factor in keeping the psalmist vulnerable to it in a prolonged sense. “O Lord do not rebuke me in your anger, or discipline me in your wrath. Be gracious to me, O Lord... My soul is struck with terror, while you, O Lord – how long?... For in death there is no remembrance of you; In Sheol who can give you praise?” The Psalmist believes that: 1) their suffering and the power of their foes is somehow connected to God’s rebuke and discipline, punishing the psalmist for some moral deficiency or failure; 2) there is no vindication and justice beyond the grave, that a loss of physical life is the end of life except what is remembered or atoned for by one’s ancestors or community; and 3) the answer to their prayer is in their enemies being ashamed and struck with terror in return for what they have done, and this would be the answer to prayer.

But what if God, the answer to prayer, the experience of vindication and resurrection out of languishing to flourishing, can all be manifested differently? What if genuine victory in overcoming enemies is not in relishing their suffering? What if God’s power is not about controlling things external to us, but in resurrecting new life and new direction from within us outward, especially through the power of new faith, hope and love rising up? And what if such new power is what not only heals languishing and leads to flourishing, but also influences greater wholeness in the world?

But alas, most of us often live somewhere in the middle, between languishing and flourishing, between the state of the Psalmist at the beginning of the psalm and their anticipatory experience of a positive answer to prayer... May we find genuine light to light our way toward greater flourishing out of our particular experiences of languishing in this time of our lives.

PRAYER: Too often we languish, O God, and this season of Covid only exacerbates our proclivity to languish. Meet us where we are, O God. Fill us not with resentment at whatever foes we face, but a capacity for love to grow from within us, rising higher than the wounds, the suffering and the hurt. May we feel again with a fresh vibrancy of hope in what you have yet to fulfill in and through us. You can do all things, O God. Turn our languishing into new seeds of faith. Revive our practice of personal prayer... Amen.