

JUNE 11, 2021

Psalm 14

¹ Fools say in their hearts, 'There is no God.'
They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds;
there is no one who does good.

² The LORD looks down from heaven on humankind
to see if there are any who are wise,
who seek after God.

³ They have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse;
there is no one who does good,
no, not one.

⁴ Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers
who eat up my people as they eat bread,
and do not call upon the LORD?

⁵ There they shall be in great terror,
for God is with the company of the righteous.

⁶ You would confound the plans of the poor,
but the LORD is their refuge.

⁷ O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion!
When the LORD restores the fortunes of God's people,
Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.

A psalm, like any passage of scripture, remains abstract until it is personalized. The challenge with personalization, though, is that it can also distort the message. The subject of this psalm are "fools" (1) and "evildoers" (4). Who are they? Are they outsiders or are they insiders who hold the power? And if they are insiders, isn't the evil more insidious? In the name of God and church, King/Queen and country, "corruption and abominable deeds" (1) are committed. They are "perverse" (3), they "eat up" the people "as they eat bread" (4), and they seek to "confound the plans of the poor" (6). In other words, they use and abuse people to serve their power and privilege, destroying the hopes and dreams of those without power they should be serving rather than harming.

I must say, like many of you, I've been totally absorbed with grief and distress in the discovery of the remains of hundreds of indigenous children, anticipating more to

come... In the name of God, of Queen and country, church and state have committed abominable atrocities. We are part of that church and state. Indigenous children, their families and communities are the poor and powerless eaten up like bread. We have behaved collectively as if “there is no God” (1).

We’re told that “The Lord looks down from heaven on humankind to see if there are any who are wise, who seek after God” (2). From what the psalmist can see in those who hold the power, “there is no one who is good” (1), “they have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse; there is no one who does good, no, not one.” (3). This is hyperbole, but when you are overwhelmed by the wickedness, it’s hard to see any nuance in who is more wicked or less so. All are wicked because great sin has been committed by the collective whole. We as ordinary Canadians of a later generation and as non-Catholic Christians may differentiate ourselves, especially from those in power who were more directly involved in decision-making around residential schools, and those who ran the schools themselves and did the harming, and have not yet apologized (the Presbyterian Church has done so). And yet, for indigenous people who are directly affected by the staggering scale of the atrocities, it’s hard to feel any nuance. We’re all together implicated. In the name of God we have behaved as if there is no God. We have eaten up the people like we’ve eaten up bread. God have mercy...

Yes mercy... Mercy is meaningless without incorporating the discipline of repentance, confession & reparation on the journey toward healing and reconciliation. “For God is with the company of the righteous. You would confound the plans of the vulnerable poor, but the Lord is their refuge”(6). God’s mercy to us must incorporate our repentance and reparation toward the vulnerable poor we have collectively harmed.

But is there hope that healing can happen? The final verse offers a prayerful hope... “O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion”(7). Zion is where the temple is, where God is. Israel is the people. Who is included there? The vulnerable poor and all victims for sure. But what about the perpetrators of harm (we as Canadians and Christians)? Will healing come for us also, especially as we welcome the discipline of accountability with all that this means going forward?

Our hope is in the promise: not if, but “when the Lord restores the fortunes of God’s people, Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad”(7). This promise can only be fulfilled if we submit ourselves to the Lord’s mercy and embrace the journey of restoration of indigenous people. A door is opened for us to be incorporated again into God’s people alongside indigenous peoples. We are included as we embrace the costly way of restorative justice. The promise in restoration is that grief honoured will also create

space for joy and gladness to arise, especially as healing and reconciliation comes to be. Let's hope and pray, and let's live into what can yet be.

PRAYER: We need your mercy, O God, and we need to submit to the judgement of your justice... Healing cannot come by escaping accountability, and the courage to face wrong must be greater than the temptation to run away or numb the guilt and shame... We cannot claim the privilege of citizenship in this nation without the responsibility that also comes with it, O God... Have mercy on us... Awaken us to the path we must take going forward. Give us faith that new doors of hope and love will open up for us if and when we submit to your discipline of repentance and reparation... We surrender ourselves to your grace, O Holy One, knowing that your infinite love turned to grief for those dead children is the same love that will carry us through our journey of accountability into more genuine wholeness, even to joy and gladness one day... Amen.