

Psalm 89: 1-2,5-8,13-15

¹ I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, for ever;
with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

² I declare that your steadfast love is established for ever;
your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

⁵ Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD,
your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones.

⁶ For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD?

Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD,

⁷ a God feared in the council of the holy ones,
great and awesome above all that are around God?

⁸ O LORD God of hosts,
who is as mighty as you, O LORD?
Your faithfulness surrounds you.

¹³ You have a mighty arm;
strong is your hand, high your right hand.

¹⁴ Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;
steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.

¹⁵ Happy are the people who know the festal shout,
who walk, O LORD, in the light of your countenance.

These verses are part of a larger poem calling on God's blessing on Israel's king and support for the king against his enemies. But within the poem are these verses that point to a vision of the world, and how the world and God are interconnected. First of all, the ancient world didn't imagine there was simply one God, but many gods and many heavenly beings as well. Just like any human royal court where there was a king or queen, but then a whole slew of nobles and officials all the way down to the servants, it was imagined that God was like the king/queen of the world with other gods/goddesses and angel messengers and servants often moving between heaven and earth, the eternal dimension and the historical time-bound one.

While the bible sometimes refers to such a vision of a "heavenly court" (e.g. Job) there is also, increasingly, a vision of God as the one power and sovereign. Other "gods" are simply idols of human fabrication. Moreover, as the universal oneness of God develops, so too the vision of God as a God of all peoples and the whole universe. The creation stories of Genesis come out of such a vision. While this psalm, and the psalms in general, embrace a vision of God as universal sovereign, the poetic imagination of the composers reaches into more ancient ways of imagining the invisible world.

What I particularly find richly appealing are not so much the references to various beings in the heavenly court surrounding God, but rather how character attributes and values

descriptive of the nature of God are also visualized as energies or auras around God. “Who is mighty as you O Lord? Your faithfulness surrounds you... Righteousness and justice are the foundations of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you...” God’s might is redefined not so much as the kind of might of a warrior king able to crush their enemies. Certainly the people of God struggled with the desire for revenge against their enemies. But there are also other, more pastoral images as well as images of values, principles and character attributes.

“Faithfulness” is about someone’s commitment to you come hell or highwater. Whatever happens, I will be there. Even when there are circumstances beyond our capability to control, I will be there. “Righteousness” and “Justice” are twin terms pointing to what is right versus what is so often wrong in our world and our lives. God represents that right and God is committed to that right even if that right is too often trampled by malignant forces. Finally, there is “steadfast love.” Love is a word everyone uses. It’s lost its distinctiveness and its edge. Everyone loves, is in love or makes love. But “steadfast” love means a love that is committed to you and will stand by you whatever the weather, whatever the crisis, whatever the challenge and whatever the struggle. If God is truly love, than God must be felt and known in one’s heart as steadfast love, faithful love, and the kind of love that will never compromise righteousness and justice even when it’s a losing proposition in the world. Do you feel God’s love that way in your heart? Does God surround you as faithfulness, justice and steadfast love? Try visualizing yourself surrounded and upheld by divine energies so defined...

PRAYER: Reveal yourself to us, O God... Reveal yourself to us as a faithfulness that will never abandon us, especially when we feel neglected or alone. Reveal yourself to us as a justice that will never accept a wrong as a right even when we must find ways to co-exist with wrongs we can’t always make right. Reveal yourself to us as a love that is steadfast, and will stick it out with us until we find new courage, resilience and compassion to empower us against fear, resentment or despair seeking to overpower us. May we feel your energy all around us and within us trying to resurrect new life in us this season of Easter... Amen.