

## PSALM 115: 1-13

<sup>1</sup> Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory,  
for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness.

<sup>2</sup> Why should the nations say,  
'Where is their God?'

<sup>3</sup> Our God is in the heavens...

<sup>4</sup> Their idols are silver and gold,  
the work of human hands.

<sup>5</sup> They have mouths, but do not speak;  
eyes, but do not see.

<sup>6</sup> They have ears, but do not hear;  
noses, but do not smell.

<sup>7</sup> They have hands, but do not feel;  
feet, but do not walk;  
they make no sound in their throats.

<sup>8</sup> Those who make them are like them;  
so are all who trust in them.

<sup>9</sup> O Israel, trust in the LORD!

God is their help and their shield.

<sup>10</sup> O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD!

God is their help and their shield.

<sup>11</sup> You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD!

God is their help and their shield.

<sup>12</sup> The LORD has been mindful of us; God will bless us;

God will bless the house of Israel;

God will bless the house of Aaron;

<sup>13</sup> God will bless those who fear the LORD,  
both small and great.

What is the purpose of this psalm? The purpose of this psalm is to activate God to act. "Not to us, O Lord... but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness. Why should the nations say, 'Where is their God?'" (v.1-2) In other words, dear God, your glory and pride are at stake if other people with other gods see our calamitous situation and question your love and faithfulness to act on our behalf. How are other people and we your own people to believe you are almighty to save and bless if we are in a mess of a situation for all our devotion and fidelity to you?

And yet, this psalm is also about God's people changing the way they see and experience God active among them. The 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 10 commandments given to the people states: "you shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in the heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You

shall not bow down to them or worship them.” (Exodus 20:4-5) This psalm contrasts “our God” who is “in the heavens” with their “idols” made of silver and gold, images and statues made with human hands. Why are idols such a terrible thing? Idols are gods we create, pray to and worship in the hopes that we get what it is we want. Idols are tangible and material, rooted in our core fears and desires for success, prosperity, health and the flourishing of our friends and family. By being so physically concrete, idols give the illusion that we can get what we want and control our situation. Our gods are only as good as our good fortune and success or as impotent as our weakness in the face of misfortune or failure. If we create our gods, we better control what we want and the outcome we want.

But the God who is the ground of being, who is steadfast Love and Faithfulness, is a God who is active among us without the silver and gold, the eyes, ears, hands and feet of idols. The God in the heavens is also the God in our hearts, activating us to become the hands, feet, eyes and hearts of faith, hope and love whether in good fortune or misfortune, success or failure, because that is real life unadorned by illusions. If God is going to be a “help” and a “shield” (v.9,10,11), and a “mindful” energy who will “bless” us in some way (v.12-13), God must grow and equip us through all the challenges of life.

We live in a time and place where many ask “Where is their God” about us who claim faith. It is a time of secularism, agnosticism and atheism, with more and more people claiming “no religion” in census data across Canada. And people of other faiths can sometimes witness to an even greater faith than our own in the face of misfortune and tragedy. May the weakness of our Christian faith be tied to our temptation to want a God that is more akin to an idol we construct, a God we expect to meet our every want and need, a God who will reward us for our devotion in tangible ways?

Psalm 115 may be the right psalm to remind us that God is not a Santa Claus or a genie giving us our every wish, but a God who will bless us according to how open and ready we are to become the hands, feet and heart of divine love in the world. God is active in and through us as we are activated, and God heals and transforms as we are healed and transformed, through the bad and the good, the struggles and the glories. We may not get everything we want. And we may not be able to protect those we care about. But we may also discover that real life is about who we become and how we are healed and heal in return through an ever growing resilience of love, grounded in a God of heaven and earth, a God healing and active through all that comes our way in life. A relationship with God is not about getting what we want but about discovering God as an inner healing strength of steadfast love growing in us.

**PRAYER:** We want many things, O God, and the things we want are often good things - health and well-being, less stress paying our bills, a better future free of the many worries, a relationship with less conflict, the welfare of our families and friends... And yet whether we get what we want sometimes and not other times, you're call to us and movement within us is about inspiring and empowering us with faith, hope and love to praise you in good times and build resilience, grace, kindness and compassion in tough times... Heal us of our illusions and disappointments, O God, and raise us up to newness in our character and focus in life... grant us peace in accepting what is even if it's not what we want. And grant us compassionate outrage to seek out change and protest for change when it's about the well being of the world of which we are a part, including our own dignity and well-being. We are thankful when our healing and strengthening is tangible, O God, and we draw on your strength and peace when the healing has not come as we hoped... Amen.