

# PSALM 131

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

<sup>1</sup> O LORD, my heart is not lifted up,  
my eyes are not raised too high;  
I do not occupy myself with things  
too great and too marvellous for me.

<sup>2</sup> But I have calmed and quieted my soul,  
like a weaned child with its mother;  
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.

<sup>3</sup> O Israel, hope in the LORD  
from this time on and for evermore.

Even as this is a psalm of ascent, recited by pilgrims making their way up the hill to Jerusalem and the temple, the message seems to be about lowering one's expectations and dampening one's enthusiasm: "O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvellous for me..."

On the other hand, the psalm ends with a call to hope: "O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time on and for evermore." Is this a contradiction in the psalm, or is it the expressions of a conflicted heart, afraid of having their hopes dashed once again, and yet risking hope despite repeated disappointments?

Or perhaps the key to the message of this psalm is a deeper wisdom in the middle? "But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me." What does it mean to be weaned? For a child it means transitioning from singular dependence on their mother's milk for sustenance. In a broader sense the dictionary provides this definition: "to accustom someone to manage without something on which they have become dependent or of which they have become excessively fond." Of what is the psalmist dependent on or excessively fond and in need of weaning? Is it hope? Or is it a certain kind of hope that is limited?

Often, the kind of hope we, like the psalmist, are dependent on and in need of weaning off of is rooted in the kind of imagination, longing and even pining for the way things used to be before something significant fell on our laps and changed things. Is it a loss, a betrayal of trust, a profound disappointment in someone or something? Is it a change in health, in a financial situation and the necessity to give up certain things we have been accustomed to having and even taking for granted?

Imagine if all the hope we can hope for is some kind of restoration? Isn't this a recipe for repeated disappointment leading to despair? But what if hope is bigger than that? What if hope

also includes an element of the unknown, something of a new adventure life is challenging us to embark on? What if we are called to be open and ready to see and learn new things, new ways of being, new kinds of patience and compassion, listening and kindness with ourselves and others? Maybe we can become more deeply impassioned about values and justice, able to step into the shoes of those who also suffer with a greater heart capacity to feel, to weep, but also, in time, to laugh and find joy in ways we never did before?...

What does the psalmist say? "I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvellous for me..." Is this a lowering of expectations or is it also, perhaps even more so, an openness to new things that will be discovered one has never known before and a kind of entering into a whole new world of lived experience with challenges and trials, yes, but also riches and marvels yet to be discovered if... if one is open in hope to the mystery of what will be. I don't have to figure it out and understand it all in advance. I am open to what will be and I'll embrace hope in what can yet be.

I have to believe that this psalm has to be about this other kind of hope, because why would a psalm be included in the psalter that is just counselling us to lower our expectations? Why end the psalm with: "O Israel, hope in the Lord, from this time on and for evermore"? It's not about less hope but a different kind of hope. And we all need this kind of hope more than any other kind, for life will bring its disappointments and difficult challenges as much as its blessings and joys. The key, always, is how we grow through all of it and end our days able to say: thank you, yes, we've made it... not as long as I would have wanted, not in many ways that I would have wanted, but I have been accompanied by divine grace and the Holy Spirit and Jesus has died and is risen and this is my destiny too...

What do you think?

PRAYER: Thank you, O God, for hope, even when it feels like hope against hope. Thank you for that crack of light that shines into us and motivates us to get up and try again in search of a new beginning, a new approach or a new direction... Thank you for opening our eyes to see situations as opportunities rather than impossibilities, as openings to a new way of being, given the end of something loved and lost... May our attachments to the way things are and the people in our lives not become chains around our necks, but reasons to be grateful for this time, knowing that change will also come at some point in some way. The one constant for ever in our lives is you... May your Spirit flow through all our loves and our relations and open up fresh pathways in our lives after our losses... In Jesus' name; Amen.

