

## PSALM 72

- <sup>1</sup> Give the king your justice, O God,  
and your righteousness to a king's son.
- <sup>2</sup> May he judge your people with righteousness,  
and your poor with justice.
- <sup>3</sup> May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,  
and the hills, in righteousness.
- <sup>4</sup> May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,  
give deliverance to the needy,  
and crush the oppressor.
- <sup>8</sup> May he have dominion from sea to sea,  
and from the river to the ends of the earth.
- <sup>9</sup> May his foes bow down before him,  
and his enemies lick the dust.
- <sup>10</sup> May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles  
render him tribute,  
may the kings of Sheba and Seba  
bring gifts.
- <sup>11</sup> May all kings fall down before him,  
all nations give him service.
- <sup>12</sup> For he delivers the needy when they call,  
the poor and those who have no helper.
- <sup>13</sup> He has pity on the weak and the needy,  
and saves the lives of the needy.
- <sup>14</sup> From oppression and violence he redeems their life;  
and precious is their blood in his sight.

This psalm is focused on the ideal ruler or “king”. What makes an ideal ruler? “May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice... May he defend the cause of the poor of the people and give deliverance to the needy... For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those with no helper... From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight.” So, what then makes an ideal ruler? One who cares, defends and ‘redeems the life’ of the vulnerable, poor and those in need, those without a voice, those marginalized because they are different and those seeking justice who have little power. Isn’t this a wonderfully basic template for any ruler in any time and place including our own?

What do we look for most in a leader? Is it their popularity, their assertiveness and their ability to make us ever more prosperous? Or is it how they lift up the needs, concerns and voices of those at the bottom, seeking to raise them up and create greater dignity and equality in society. Is it also leadership in creating a place for tolerating difference with respect rather than shaming opponents.

Sadly in a time of covid, vaccine mandates, stress and burnout, we as human beings and the leaders who seek our approval for their next ruling mandate, recognize that if it’s not

compassion that will generate commonality and support, it will be finding groups to blame and shame. Covid has created such fear and frustration, that it's hard to find middle ground for difference to co-exist. And sadly, polarization ultimately plays into the hands of those on more extreme ends of our spectrum than those more in the middle. Whatever our own views and opinions, most of us must also negotiate family relationships and support for those most affected in their health or workplace regardless of what side we and they take on the issues.

The ideal ruler will zero in on where the need is and generate compassion and understanding among a wider group of the population. They will provide a larger vision that can bring people together. This is a tall order, and this is why few succeed in the call to lead and lead well.

Psalms 72 has one more attribute it offers for the ideal ruler: they will crush their enemies. Now, even though there are way too many rulers who are only too eager to crush their enemies and force them down to their knees, this psalm also refers to the kings of Tarshish, Seba, and Sheba who will bring gifts to the king of Israel as tribute. The irony here is that this psalm reference is also read as prophecy of the three Magi or kings who come to bring gifts to baby Jesus. Jesus is just a vulnerable baby, poor, in hiding from the ruthless king Herod and the religious authorities. Clearly, Jesus will fulfill this prophecy in a very different way than the psalm originally imagines it. Yes, to the poor and needy and yes to justice for all those genuinely marginalized and crushed. But not to violent suppression of enemies. The only weapon of "the King of kings and Lord of Lords" (Revelation 19:16) is the sword of love.

The question is, what weapon do we resort to when we feel threatened, angry, humiliated, frustrated or have nothing to lose in our desperation? Do we blame and shame, tear down with words and shut people down by our behaviour? Do we choose to walk away rather than make the effort to listen and try to understand another point of view for the sake of meaningful connection? Do we restrain our words and behaviour because we'd rather swallow it than hurt someone even when they are not ready to hear truth or a different opinion? There are many lessons for us all to learn in this season of covid.

**PRAYER:** Thank you for embracing us, O God. Whether we are joyful or miserable, full of gratitude or complaint, open to others or preferring to blame and shame them, listening to them or dismissing them, we thank you that you cherish us, take us seriously and invest in our ongoing becoming even when we take wrong turns... Find us in this time of our lives. Find us in this season of covid. Meet us in our fears, our frustrations, our isolation. Find us in the ways our past traumas or patterns of reacting shape how we engage others around us today. Find us in our incapacity to be present in the moment because we are stressed and distracted much of the time. Find us in our apprehension of what the future holds, so much so that we cannot embrace what is now and find a way to savour the good in it. Find us, O God, in this time, in Jesus' name; Amen.