

PSALM 77: 1-9, 11-15

- ¹ I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, that God may hear me.
² In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord;
in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying;
my soul refuses to be comforted.
³ I think of God, and I moan; I meditate, and my spirit faints.
- ⁴ You keep my eyelids from closing;
I am so troubled that I cannot speak.
⁵ I consider the days of old, and remember the years of long ago.
⁶ I commune with my heart in the night; I meditate and search my spirit:
⁷ 'Will the Lord spurn for ever, and never again be favourable?
⁸ Has God's steadfast love ceased for ever?
Are God's promises at an end for all time?
⁹ Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has God in anger shut up God's compassion?'
- ¹¹ I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD;
I will remember your wonders of old.
¹² I will meditate on all your work, and muse on your mighty deeds.
¹³ Your way, O God, is holy. What god is so great as our God?
¹⁴ You are the God who works wonders;
you have displayed your might among the peoples.
¹⁵ With your strong arm you redeemed your people,
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.

The psalmist is "crying aloud to God". Have you ever prayed that way? Have you ever thought of your tears of frustration or grief as a kind of prayer? I think particularly of the people in Ukraine right now, and all Ukrainians around the world too.

There are at least two ways to meditate on a psalm like this one. 1) One way is more literal. This psalm is intended to be an appeal to God to act. God has acted to redeem God's people in the past. God should do so now, for there is trouble and suffering. There has been loss. God must act to redeem God's people against those people and situations that have been the source of oppression. So intense is the praying there is even an edge to it: "Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has God in anger shut up God's compassion?" What have the people done that is so bad that they are allowed to suffer so?

A more literal reading of a psalm like this can only lead in two further ways. If I am a "prosperity gospel" believer, I basically see suffering as God's punishment or a test. Or else, perhaps, God was always a figment of my imagination as no one can help me in my trouble but me, myself and any around me who may offer tangible support or solutions. Has God abandoned Ukraine? Is the suffering a punishment or a test? Or is this further proof that God is a figment of people's imagination after all?

2) On the other hand, there is a more transformational way of reading this psalm. What do I mean? What if we see creation as a wonderful, diverse work of art where there is freedom and randomness built into it as much as there are rhythms and flows like the seasons? And what if the vulnerability in such freedom and randomness for us mortal humans is an invitation to use our freedom to grow faith, hope and love from within our hearts? And what if such faith, hope and love are given wings of empowerment by a God who doesn't control the universe but works from within it and within hearts who open to God for fresh healing, creative imagination, strength, compassion, outrage at injustice and passion to find a way to love no matter what?

For the psalmist, there is the opportunity to see the door that has closed as an opportunity to seek another door where God may become alive and active within the psalmist. As the psalmist and their people have experienced God's powerful presence in the past, God may become present again, to help the psalmist survive this latest ordeal, and empower the people to resist despair, finding creative ways to fight hopelessness without becoming vengeful, build resilience by building networks of mutual care and compassion for one another, becoming ever more sensitive to all those who are persecuted and marginalized because they don't fit the empire's agenda or mould. Transformation is a big word and it points to many ways God must work in and around us if we become God's instruments in our own unique ways, even when they are small ways. Small is no less special.

There are infinitely many ways God can become active in our lives and our world because God is everywhere as energy flow ready to enter open hearts. God doesn't micro manage from above or control the universe according to a moral structure of right and wrong. We may wish the world was like that but it isn't. There is freedom and randomness and too often such freedom is a horrific weapon when in the hands of a dictator. But freedom is also an invitation to choose love from the heart, and no life is worth living if there isn't such love to experience and live by.

PRAYER:

We cry up to you, O God.

Sometimes our cries are tears of grief or frustration.

Other times, they are silent and hidden deep within.

And yet, tears and cries are in us, O God, because we care and because we love.

That's how you created us to be.

We want to rejoice. We want to find the joy and beauty in loving.

Help us find the joy and beauty in love by praying for people in distress like the people of Ukraine.

We often feel helpless, O God.

May our compassion and care through our praying send healing energies to them and to others we know so that they feel they are not alone, so that they find some inner

strength to go on, to rise up, to have hope that some vindication and peace may come
their way in some way, some day.

May they feel the assurance of knowing their lives are in your hands now and forever.

We pray for them, we pray for others we know, we pray for ourselves, too.

Transform us in the midst of life...

In Jesus' name; Amen.