

## PSALM 87

<sup>1</sup> On the holy mount stands the city God founded;  
<sup>2</sup> the LORD loves the gates of Zion  
more than all the dwellings of Jacob.  
<sup>3</sup> Glorious things are spoken of you,  
O city of God.

<sup>4</sup> Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon;  
Philistia too, and Tyre, with Ethiopia—  
'This one was born there,' they say.

<sup>5</sup> And of Zion it shall be said,  
'This one and that one were born in it';  
for the Most High will establish it.

<sup>6</sup> God records, as God registers the peoples,  
'This one was born there.'

<sup>7</sup> Singers and dancers alike say,  
'All my springs are in you.'

The vision of this psalm is for a return of the people to their homeland... I think of the people of Ukraine forced to flee and their hopes and dreams of one day returning...

For Israelites, the capital city Jerusalem, or referred to with its spiritual name "Zion", represents the heart of the people's identity and home. This identity and home also includes the presence of God in a special way. "Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God" is a great hymn in our hymn book (483).

But unlike so many psalms, this one does not include any pleas for deliverance or calls for revenge against the peoples' enemies. It does not appeal to God to act, and it does not ask for forgiveness presuming God's failure to act and the peoples' sad fate is a result of their sin and faithlessness to God's justice and love. None of that.

Rather, this psalm offers us an expansive vision. It's full of love and inclusion. It names many of the peoples surrounding historic Israel like Rahab, Tyre and Philistia, but also peoples from places where they have been exiled like Babylon, and even further in Africa like Ethiopia.

And what does it say? It speaks of peoples from all these places coming to Zion or returning to Zion. Some will be refugees. Some will be returning to a homeland they were forced to flee. But this psalm also suggests that non-Hebrews may also have a place in this re-constituted Zion. Zion may be Jerusalem, but it is also bigger than just the place called Jerusalem. Zion is a spiritual place, the heart of God's dwelling. The vision is of a place where all peoples can gather and have a home.

But there's more. Often, when people are forced to flee to another country, they are also pressured to forget their former identities. They are now part of a new nation. They must assimilate and integrate. How is that possible if they still identify with their former homelands, cultures and traditions? The psalm speaks of people being "registered" by God, acknowledging where they have been born and where they have come from. Their identities are sacred and not to be displaced in their new home. In fact, the psalm even suggests that peoples' identities will be registered as their birth-place, not their new national citizenship. Zion's identity as a nation under God will be celebrated (with "singers and dancers") as a place for the diversity of God's people, rather than a place that enforces some kind of unity as uniformity. Isn't this a beautiful thing? Many of us who are immigrants within our lifetimes will treasure such a vision.

And one final thing. Even as people will continue to celebrate where they have come from, Zion will become their new home for the very reason diversity is celebrated. People will one day say: "This one and this one were born in it." It will be a reason for pride to be born in a place that celebrates diversity not just in words, but in every way peoples co-exist. Zion will become our spiritual home too.

Even as we celebrate Canada as a multi-cultural nation, and even as Canada is admired around the world for reflecting such diversity; nevertheless, we see racism and inequality all around us. And we certainly see it in how settler-immigrants have dealt with those who already inhabited the land when we came, forcing them to erase their identities in order to assimilate. May the vision of Zion as God's vision for us all as people living together, inspire us as we continue to seek out community and build community together.

**PRAYER:** You love us, O God, in all our humanity, in all of what makes us the particular human beings we are. May such faith in your love for us and such love filling up our hearts, inspire us to better love the particular humanity and creaturehood of the life around us. May we better reflect the hope of your vision: that there is a place and a space for us all in your world, and only as we care for each other and make room for each other, will we find our own wholeness. Fill us with your inclusive and spacious love, O God; Amen.