

## Psalm 69: 1-5,16-18

<sup>1</sup> Save me, O God,  
for the waters have come up to my neck.

<sup>2</sup> I sink in deep mire,  
where there is no foothold;  
I have come into deep waters,  
and the flood sweeps over me.

<sup>3</sup> I am weary with my crying;  
my throat is parched.  
My eyes grow dim  
with waiting for my God.

<sup>4</sup> More in number than the hairs of my head  
are those who hate me without cause;  
many are those who would destroy me,  
my enemies who accuse me falsely.

What I did not steal  
must I now restore?

<sup>5</sup> O God, you know my folly;  
the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you.

<sup>16</sup> Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good;  
according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.

<sup>17</sup> Do not hide your face from your servant,  
for I am in distress—make haste to answer me.

<sup>18</sup> Draw near to me, redeem me,  
set me free because of my enemies.

What makes poetry really good poetry? Many things, for sure, but one of the key things is that good poetry gives us words to express certain experiences, and more. Good poetry takes us into those experiences.

This psalm is a prayer, a deep, heart-rending plea for help. The imagery it evokes is powerful. Perhaps we've had nightmare dreams of what it would feel like to be drowning, to be in water that is so deep, we can't step on any ground and are incapable of keeping ourselves above any longer... Or for many, such as those in parts of Canada, who have experienced severe flooding with water that keeps rising... These are fearful images that also speak about situations in life that can also make us feel like we're drowning and going under. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt you were drowning and going under?...

The other imagery is the kind of weeping the psalmist describes that is so intense and so prolonged that we are exhausted by it. Our throat is parched and we are totally dehydrated

after all the fluids have been drained out of us with our crying. Our vision is foggy for all the tears... Have you ever cried like that?...

So what's the cause of the psalmist distress? We don't know exactly. They speak of enemies so great in number, they are more than the hairs on the psalmist's head. How could anyone have so many enemies? What situations of distress in life are so severe that we express the cause of it in such exaggerated terms?

One of the issues the psalmist does name is false accusation. They feel they are being accused falsely and are being pressured to admit to wrongs they have not committed. This seems so similar to the story and situation of the biblical Job. Job and the psalms are both "Wisdom" literature of our Older Testament. Both the psalmist and Job want one thing: mercy, redemption, vindication, freedom. Job also wants justice against those who accuse him of having done something wrong for which he must be suffering. The psalmist doesn't quite say this. Like Job, he admits that he has done wrongs, but there is also the injustice of being maligned and persecuted falsely. Have you ever been wrongly accused of something and try as you may, you couldn't convince your accuser(s) you were innocent of the charges?

This psalm doesn't end like other psalms, where a positive answer from God in the form of vindication and redemption is anticipated. It ends as it begins, making an appeal for God to answer. But the appeal now is to a God of "steadfast love" and "abundant mercy." The psalmist is not appealing for revenge but love and mercy. If they receive it and experience it, how may that shape the answer to prayer they may experience which may not be the answer they were looking for at the beginning of their praying? Does vindication, consolation, redemption, freedom and peace have to be about revenge? Or is the greater victory letting go the grip the injustice of others have over us? We need justice and we must fight for justice always, for ourselves and for others. But without some letting go, our justice turns vindictive quickly. What do you think?

**PRAYER:** We need you, O God... we need you to liberate us, to empower us, to give us the strength to stand up for justice and not be afraid. But we also need love in our hearts, a renewal of love when anger, bitterness and distress seep into our hearts and souls... these are difficult times, O God, challenging times... Some of us carry deep wounds that have not healed because there has been no acknowledgement, repentance, reparation or even contrition from those who have been the cause... How can we be free, O God? How can we rise above the waters, dry up our tears, and feel grounded in our innocence even as others may continue to accuse us falsely? May your steadfast love and abundant mercy wash over us and flow right through us heart and soul... In Jesus' name... Amen.

