

Devotion: Wednesday, April 8, 2020

Psalm 22 The Message (MSG)

A David Psalm

22 ¹⁻² God, God . . . my God!
Why did you dump me
miles from nowhere?
Doubled up with pain, I call to God
all the day long. No answer. Nothing.
I keep at it all night, tossing and turning.

³⁻⁵ And you! Are you indifferent, above it all,
leaning back on the cushions of Israel's praise?
We know you were there for our parents:
they cried for your help and you gave it;
they trusted and lived a good life.

⁶⁻⁸ And here I am, a nothing—an earthworm,
something to step on, to squash.
Everyone pokes fun at me;
they make faces at me, they shake their heads:
“Let's see how God handles this one;
since God likes him so much, let *him* help him!”

⁹⁻¹¹ And to think you were midwife at my birth,
setting me at my mother's breasts!
When I left the womb you cradled me;
since the moment of birth you've been my God.
Then you moved far away
and trouble moved in next door.
I need a neighbor.

¹²⁻¹³ Herds of bulls come at me,
the raging bulls stampede,
Horns lowered, nostrils flaring,
like a herd of buffalo on the move.

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ I'm a bucket kicked over and spilled,
every joint in my body has been pulled apart.
My heart is a blob
of melted wax in my gut.
I'm dry as a bone,
my tongue black and swollen.
They have laid me out for burial
in the dirt.

¹⁶⁻¹⁸ Now packs of wild dogs come at me;
thugs gang up on me.
They pin me down hand and foot,
and lock me in a cage—a bag
Of bones in a cage, stared at
by every passerby.
They take my wallet and the shirt off my back,
and then throw dice for my clothes.

¹⁹⁻²¹ You, God—don't put off my rescue!
Hurry and help me!
Don't let them cut my throat;
don't let those mongrels devour me.
If you don't show up soon,
I'm done for—gored by the bulls,
meat for the lions.

²²⁻²⁴ Here's the story I'll tell my friends when they come to worship,
and punctuate it with Hallelujahs:
Shout Hallelujah, you God-worshippers;
give glory, you sons of Jacob;
adore him, you daughters of Israel.
He has never let you down,
never looked the other way
when you were being kicked around.
He has never wandered off to do his own thing;
he has been right there, listening.

²⁵⁻²⁶ Here in this great gathering for worship
I have discovered this praise-life.
And I'll do what I promised right here
in front of the God-worshippers.
Down-and-outers sit at God's table
and eat their fill.
Everyone on the hunt for God
is here, praising him.
“Live it up, from head to toe.
Don't ever quit!”

²⁷⁻²⁸ From the four corners of the earth
people are coming to their senses,
are running back to God.
Long-lost families
are falling on their faces before him.
God has taken charge;
from now on he has the last word.

²⁹ All the power-mongers are before him
—worshiping!
All the poor and powerless, too
—worshiping!
Along with those who never got it together
—worshiping!

³⁰⁻³¹ Our children and their children
will get in on this
As the word is passed along
from parent to child.
Babies not yet conceived
will hear the good news—
that God does what he says.

“*Eloi, eloi, lema sabachthani?*” (Mark 15:34).

Who is to blame for the country now on shut down?

Our political leaders blame, China, The World Health Organization.

The Democrats blame the Republicans the Republicans blame the Democrats.

The scientists blame it on global warming.

The states blame the federal government.

The federal government blame the states.

The right-wing Christians blame it on homosexuals.

The president deflects all blame.

The Gospel’s tells us that there was plenty of blame to go around on that Good Friday two thousand years ago. At the top of the list were the religious authorities who, ironically, accuse an innocent Jesus of “blasphemy” while heaping blame upon him in a “fake news” trial and quick sentence. The Roman Empire, represented by Pontius Pilate, was guilty, too, of using its violence as a way of punishment for its subjects. Even Jesus’ closest friends make the list — one having betrayed him and the rest having abandoned him. Jesus hung naked in shame, broken, bleeding from violence, alone with no one to comfort him, and dying as a death-row inmate who never committed a crime. If anyone had reason to assign blame to the whole of humanity, it was Jesus.

Yet, Jesus *does not even utter a word of blame toward any person, even those who had beaten and tortured him.* The only words of Jesus concerning his tormentors are in the form of a prayer

of mercy for them: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

So Jesus doesn’t blame others for the mess he’s in; but does he blame God?

Sounds like it. “*Eloi, eloi, lema sabachthani?*” (Mark 15:34). which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Is Jesus blaming God here in his last moments?

It’s important to realize, that neither Jesus nor the writer of the psalm blame God. We, being human, love handing out credit and blame and God often becomes the chief cause of pain in the minds of many people. I can’t tell you how many times I had a suffering person in my office at some point asking, “Why did God do this to me?” or “Why did God let this happen to me?” The question that the psalmist asks and that Jesus cries out on the cross is, instead, “Where is God in the middle of my suffering?” More specifically, we might ask, “What do we do when there seems to be no evidence that God is with us?”

Here’s where this psalm and the passion of Jesus can teach us something powerful. Jesus has the psalm in mind on the cross and we read the psalm with Jesus on the cross in our minds. The Jesus who hangs on the cross not only cries out to God, but is God — the one who saves and the one who suffers. In Jesus, God has spoken to human suffering not through theological discussions and clichés about perseverance. Instead, God speaks to human suffering by participating fully within it, taking it on, living it, bearing all the blame and shame and pain of humanity in a moment on the cross. The irony is that in those times of suffering when God seems absent, it is then that God is most intimately near because God has been where we are. Only God, in the person of Christ, can truly say to us, “I know how you feel.”

Jesus didn’t play the blame game, but chose instead to praise God in the midst of suffering, knowing that through his suffering the world would be healed. His invitation to his disciples to pick up their own crosses was an invitation to see our own suffering in the same way. We are called to see our lives, both the good times and the bad times within the larger view of God’s kingdom.

And when we look at the cross, we know precisely where God is in the midst of our suffering. He has not “dumped” us — but is there beside us.

Let us pray:

You entered into darkness to lighten the darkness of my heart.

Jesus, have mercy on me.

You carried your cross, burdened by the weight of my sin.

Jesus, have mercy on me.

You were beaten and pierced and mocked, because I chose to go my own way.

Jesus, have mercy on me.

You did all of this out of your love and mercy for me, a sinner.

Jesus, thank you for your mercy on me. Amen.

Stay safe God bless all of you

Pastor Jack