

Daily Devotions
Devotions – January 9-15, 2022
By Judy Quirk
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Sunday, January 9, 2022

Text: Psalm 77: 1-10

**I cried out to God for help;
I cried out to God to hear me.
When I was in distress, I sought the Lord;
at night I stretched out untiring hands,
and I would not be comforted.**

**I remembered you, God, and I groaned;
I meditated, and my spirit grew faint.
You kept my eyes from closing;
I was too troubled to speak.
I thought about the former days,
the years of long ago;
I remembered my songs in the night.
My heart meditated and my spirit asked:
“Will the Lord reject forever?
Will he never show his favor again?
Has his unfailing love vanished forever?
Has his promise failed for all time?
Has God forgotten to be merciful?
Has he in anger withheld his compassion?”**

A number of years ago I received a call from my brother a bit after we celebrated Christmas saying that Mom couldn't walk. What should we do? She was adamant! She wasn't going to the hospital. She would be better in the morning. I packed a few things and went to see what I might do.

I found her angry at her body for failing her, at me for not making her take more walks to keep her legs strong and even at me for not making her read and memorize more of the Bible. There was little that I could do about the first two things, but I could sit in her bed propped up by pillows and read the Bible to her. We started with the Psalms. She quickly said that she didn't need that “Make a Joyful Noise” (Psalm 100) or Shepherd (Psalm 23) stuff, but I should keep reading.

We found Psalms that pled for relief and challenged God to come quickly. We found others from ancient times who could not sleep and who wondered where was God? Although we read other books, we would return to the Psalms to examine the calls of many suffering people.

Let us pray: *Oh God, watch over us when we cannot sleep. Let us cry to you even if we cannot find words. Lead us to know what we can do to renew our sense of your presence. Lead us to find rest in you. Amen*



Monday, January 10, 2022

Text: Psalm 79: 5-9

**How long, Lord? Will you be angry forever?
How long will your jealousy burn like fire?
Pour out your wrath on the nations
that do not acknowledge you,
on the kingdoms
that do not call on your name
for they have devoured Jacob
and devastated his homeland.**

**Do not hold against us the sins of past generations;
may your mercy come quickly to meet us,
for we are in desperate need.
Help us, God our Savior,
for the glory of your name;
deliver us and forgive our sins
for your name's sake.**

From childhood I was taught that I should enter into the presence of God with reverence. Quiet, filled with awe, singing joyfully. Pastor Schultz celebrated each Sunday as a little Easter. The minor hymns were for the midweek Lenten or Advent services. Perhaps the trumpets were a bit muted but still there.

That's why this stanza of Psalm 79 speaks to me. I do not see it as read quietly. Though I doubt that I'll be out on the street corner with a bullhorn, these calls to God lend themselves to loud proclamation. I can yell at God.

**HOW LONG, LORD? WILL YOU BE ANGRY FOREVER?
...FOR WE ARE IN DESPERATE NEED.
...HELP US, GOD OUR SAVIOR...**

Remember the hymn that asks, "Do your friends despise, forsake you? Take it to the Lord in prayer." If we truly have a friend in Jesus, we can be bold to cry and shout the grievances.

This psalm is crying against the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, but the voice is angry that this terrible event has happened. We do not have to think very long to remember terrible events. Covid, Climate change that brings winter tornadoes, shootings. We, too, can shout, “How long?”

Name the evil and shout your distress to God.

Let us pray: *Help us, God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake. Amen*



Tuesday, January 11, 2022

Text: Psalm 80:1-7

**Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
thou who leanest Joseph like a flock!
Thou who art enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth
before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh!
Stir up thy might,
and come to save us!**

**Restore us, O God;
let thy face shine, that we may be saved!**

**O Lord God of hosts,
how long wilt thou be angry with thy people's prayers?
Thou hast fed them with the bread of tears,
and given them tears to drink in full measure.
Thou dost make us the scorn of our neighbors;
and our enemies laugh among themselves.**

**Restore us, O God of hosts;
let thy face shine, that we may be saved!**

Here is another psalm that cries to God for deliverance. This one seems much quieter - pleading for an answer for how long.

We are impatient and want answers yesterday. We don't want to suffer. We don't like “bread of tears or tears to drink.” Why, why is often our thought. There is no answer we can discern. In fact, there may be no human answer. So how can we continue?

I bring to mind the anthem/poem written on a cellar door during the Holocaust.

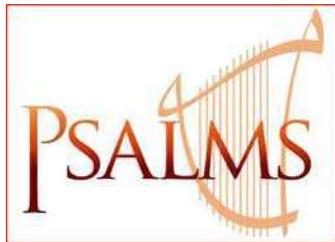
*I believe in the sun
even when it's not shining.
I believe in love
even when I cannot feel it.
I believe in God
even when he's silent.*

As Mom and I continued to wait for her to be able to walk, she remarked that it was good to remember that we humans have called for help for many ages. She was in a great stream of believers that called why, what happens next, why, how long.

I knew that her strongest prayer was why haven't you taken me to you, oh God? I, with my brothers and sister, did not want an answer to that prayer to come quickly but also prayed "Thy will be done" - but not just yet!

We are still in that place where we look for restoration but don't know what that might be or if we can recognize it when/if it comes.

Let us pray: *Oh God, bless us in our discomfort. We need guidance to recognize your hand in our life and accept your will. Amen*



Wednesday, January 12, 2022

Test: Psalm 88

**Lord, you are the God who saves me;
day and night I cry out to you.
May my prayer come before you;
turn your ear to my cry.**

**I am overwhelmed with troubles
and my life draws near to death.
I am counted among those who go down to the pit;
I am like one without strength.
I am set apart with the dead,
like the slain who lie in the grave,
whom you remember no more,**

who are cut off from your care.
You have put me in the lowest pit,
in the darkest depths.
Your wrath lies heavily on me;
you have overwhelmed me with all your waves.
You have taken from me my closest friends
and have made me repulsive to them.
I am confined and cannot escape;
my eyes are dim with grief.
I call to you, Lord, every day;
I spread out my hands to you.

Do you show your wonders to the dead?
Do their spirits rise up and praise you?
Is your love declared in the grave,
your faithfulness in Destruction?
Are your wonders known in the place of darkness,
or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?
But I cry to you for help, Lord;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.
Why, Lord, do you reject me
and hide your face from me?

From my youth I have suffered and been close to death;
I have borne your terrors and am in despair.
Your wrath has swept over me;
your terrors have destroyed me.
All day long they surround me like a flood;
they have completely engulfed me.
You have taken from me friend and neighbor—
darkness is my closest friend.

This psalm didn't lift our spirits. I don't know what I was seeking when we set out to read as much of the Bible as we could while I tried to figure out what was next for Mom's care.

We thought of times we lost our dearest friends not because we were "made repulsive to them" but because they moved or died. Mom felt confined and for a time we were overcome with grief. Until I read through all the psalms, I hadn't thought to list my woes into a poem. Have you simply made a list of all your troubles, terrors, despair, fears, illness, grief? We tried. Aches and pains, loss of position and partners, death of family and spouse, loss of abilities, our list went on for quite a long time. Then Mom and I reflected that listing our troubles actually helped. Then going further and telling God of them and asking don't you hear me? Am I forgotten? Items on our list didn't vanish as we read them but at least seemed less important.

We decided that being able to voice our thoughts and feelings no matter how sad and full of doubt still held a thread to faith because we took time to rant at God. If we didn't believe, why would we bother?

When I think on this psalm, I realize that I can bring any troubles to God

Let us pray: *Oh Holy One, hear my prayer for healing and peace. Give me strength and lift me*

from the darkness of grief. Help me know that you are with me even in terrors of the day and the night. Do not hide your face from me. Amen



Thursday, January 13, 2022

Text: Psalm 102:1-11, 12, 27-28

**Hear my prayer, Lord;
let my cry for help come to you.
Do not hide your face from me
when I am in distress.
Turn your ear to me;
when I call, answer me quickly.**

**For my days vanish like smoke;
my bones burn like glowing embers.
My heart is blighted and withered like grass;
I forget to eat my food.
In my distress I groan aloud
and am reduced to skin and bones.
I am like a desert owl,
like an owl among the ruins.
I lie awake; I have become
like a bird alone on a roof.
All day long my enemies taunt me;
those who rail against me use my name as a curse.
For I eat ashes as my food
and mingle my drink with tears
because of your great wrath,
for you have taken me up and thrown me aside.
My days are like the evening shadow;**

I wither away like grass.

Oh no. Here's part of another woeful psalm. There are new images to express our distress: bones that burn like embers, heart withered like grass, reduced to skin and bones, like a bird all alone, an owl in the desert. Again, the psalmist calls for help with a clear picture of horror. If it ended here, we could just sit and sob. Following the lament, there is more. The writer makes an astounding statement recognizing the source of hope for all times.

Text: Psalm 102:12, 27-28

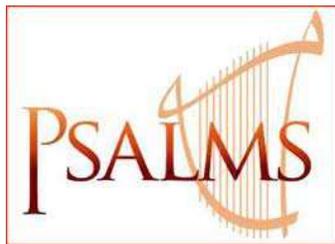
**But you, Lord, sit enthroned forever;
your renown endures through all generations.**

**But you remain the same,
and your years will never end.
The children of your servants will live in your presence;
their descendants will be established before you."**

Here I am reminded that there is more beyond our suffering. I can bring all my troubles to God and plead for help. No matter what answer comes, God is eternal.

Getting and recognizing answers is not easy for there are many possibilities from "yes" to "not now." I have to remember that "no" is also an answer. The timing of my request with the short span of my life compared to the age of the universe can mean that I don't see the answer. Still, I will ask for health for the earth, food and shelter for all beings, peace between factions/families/nations/religions. I can do this because God's years will never end.

Let us Pray: *When we cry out to you in anguish wondering how bad this life might be, let us remember that you are from everlasting to everlasting. Let our children live in your presence; keep them and the world in your hands. Amen*



Friday, January 14, 2022

Text: Psalm 130

**Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord;
Lord, hear my voice.
Let your ears be attentive
to my cry for mercy.**

**If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,
Lord, who could stand?
But with you there is forgiveness,
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.**

**I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.
I wait for the Lord
more than watchmen wait for the morning,
more than watchmen wait for the morning.**

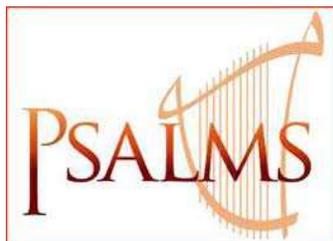
**Israel, put your hope in the Lord,
for with the Lord is unfailing love
and with him is full redemption.
He himself will redeem Israel
from all their sins.**

If you have been following this week's journey through cries and laments, you may be wondering what happened with my mom. I spent four days with her on her bed doing what had to be done and reading books of Bible. Once she decided she was not going to wake up and be ok at home, we bundled her and took her to the hospital. While the doctors considered her health, I checked into the nursing homes in the area. Mom had definite views including which home she wanted to go to. She was definite that we were not to take her into our home. I was able to find a room at the same place she once helped conduct Wednesday Bingo. With therapy she did walk for several more years and became a visitor to some of the room bound residents.

So here is Psalm 130 which is another cry to the Lord. We cry and we wait and we wait. The psalm assures that with the Lord there is forgiveness. I am comforted that if there were a record of my sins there is forgiveness. I don't know how long the watchmen wait for the morning or what that morning might bring. We can work for the world's environment or its people. There are many needs, and nothing says that we just have to sit and wait.

Hope, that is what we are to put in the Lord. What are your hopes? This week I've focused on crying to the Lord. We are free to bring our pains to the attention of the Lord, we can even yell that we think we are forgotten. We hear of unfailing love and full redemption. We are free from distress and harm.

Let us pray: *Help us be patient with each other as we wait for answers. Help us discern where we may do some good while we wait. Amen*



Saturday, January 15, 2022

Text: Jonah 4

4 But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the Lord, “Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. 3 Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

4 But the Lord replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

5 Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. 6 Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant[a] and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. 7 But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.”

9 But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?”

“It is,” he said. “And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.”

10 But the Lord said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. 11 And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

You likely have read or heard the story of Jonah. This is one of the books I read to my mom that week. It is included in this week’s prayers/devotions because it shows another way to speak to our God. Not politely saying, “Dear God, please listen to me,” but with anger. Jonah yelled and sassed God. He used a bit of “I told you so!” He even dared God to take away his life. I think he pouted too.

Asking if it was right for Jonah to be angry, God pointed out that his compassion extended not only to the people of Nineveh but also to the animals. So much more than we can imagine. People have yelled, pleaded, cried, sassed, or talked plainly to God. I recall the Judy Blume book, “Are You There, God? It’s Me, Margaret,” where a young girl prays through conversation. I think of LWR quilters where every stitch is a prayer or kit makers with each pencil and pad of paper being blessed. I often feel inadequate when asked to pray so I’m pleased that there are so many ways.

A friend once told me that there aren’t any better/best ways to pray only ways to avoid praying. With that advice I try a format that first blesses those nearby, perhaps those in my household. Then I expand to my city, state, nation, the world. Following that I reverse the order and ask for things that are needed ending with local items. This can develop into a long conversation and I often fall asleep before I’m finished. Good thing that God knows what we need before we even ask.

Let us pray: *Dear God, listen to us as we make our way through this life you have given us. Be with us if we speak in anger or fear or awe. Help us, even though we do not know what we need help with. Amen*

Also remember that the psalms are also a source of comfort and celebration.

Text: Psalm 100

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

**Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.**

Know that the Lord is God.

**It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.**

**Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.**

**For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations. Pray Faithfully**

