

Sunday 14 June 2020

Songs from the heart: Psalm 42

Loving God, as I draw near to you, draw near to me. As I seek your face, speak to me. As I confess my faults and failings, cleanse me through the saving love of Christ. As I am reminded of all you have done for me, challenge me to make my response. As I recognise my lack of vision and courage, inspire me through your Holy Spirit.

I rejoice in the quiet security of God's powerful arms and praise him in the words of Psalm 116:5-7.

- ⁵ Gracious is the LORD, and righteous;
our God is merciful.
- ⁶ The LORD protects the simple;
when I was brought low, he saved me.
- ⁷ Return, O my soul, to your rest,
for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.

In this Psalm of praise the singer addresses his own soul: "God has been good and delivered you from harm. Now rest in him again as you once did." In Psalm 42 the same parties take part in an altogether different conversation.

- ¹ As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.
- ² My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.
When shall I come and behold
the face of God?
- ³ My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me continually,
"Where is your God?"
- ⁴ These things I remember,
as I pour out my soul:
how I went with the throng,
and led them in procession to the house of God,
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving,
a multitude keeping festival.
- ⁵ Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help⁶ and my God.

Psalm 42:1–6a (NRSV)

In this Psalm the singer is still experiencing troubles. Although unspecified the results of these problems are clear. Chief among them is ridicule: "Where is you God in all this trouble?" In the face of this questioning the Psalmist turns to God in prayer.

I have never experienced real physical thirst, but I suspect that the plaintive cry of a wild animal dying of thirst would cut deep. Do I feel my need for God, and the living water, with the same sense of heartfelt urgency? Psalm 63:1 speaks of searching for God in a dry and weary land where there is no water. Many today feel that sense of thirst and find no respite. That is because God created the soul to correspond to him, and where that correspondence is weakened, disturbed, or interrupted, the experience of its lack becomes like the thirst that is the opposite of being satisfied. The advantage of the psalmist is that he knows what is missing. He understands that the dissatisfaction of life is the thirst for God.

I pause and pray for those I know who are dissatisfied, disillusioned, angry, thirsty. Today may they find water to ease their thirst.

Pause and pray

When facing the Cross, Jesus echoed the language of this Psalm in speaking of his own downcast, disquieted soul (see Matthew 26:38 and John 12:27). None of us escapes the need that is the subject of this prayer. Jesus teaches us also that those who have and understand this thirst are indeed blessed, because it is the thirst that brings us to the justifying presence of God (Matthew 5:6). In the Gospel of John, Jesus reveals himself as the source of the water that satisfies the thirst of the soul (John 4:14; 6:35).^{*} Living in a world that constantly raises the question, "Where is your God?" this Psalm points me toward the only satisfying answer.

⁵ Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help⁶ and my God.

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*As I go from here, may God go with me. May he shine a light on my path, and lead me into a deeper friendship with himself, so that I might better know his heart, and feel my own being renewed.
Amen.*

^{*} See Mays, J.L., 1994. *Psalms*, Louisville, KY: John Knox Press.