

## Psalm 77

Morning Prayer Wednesday Week 2

The psalmist is desperate. He lies awake at night worrying about his situation which is such that he wonders whether YHWH\* no longer cares for him. He tries to sustain his spirit by recalling the wonderful ways in which YHWH showed his care at the time of the Exodus from Egypt. The title reads: 'To the leader: according to Jeduthun. Of Asaph\*. A Psalm\*.' Jeduthun is mentioned also in the titles to Psalms 39 and 62. He was a singer in David's court (1Chronicles 16:41).

### Part One. A troubled cry from someone who seems to have lost all hope

God seems absent, but the psalmist cries out trusting to be heard. He does not stop seeking this absent God his 'Lord' [<sup>a</sup>dōnay יְיָ].

They put their trust in you,  
all who acknowledge your name, for you,  
YHWH, do not forsake those who seek you.

– Psalm 9:10

YHWH looks down from heaven on Adam's  
descendants to see if there is a wise person any-  
where, one who seeks after God.

– Psalm 14:2

The poor shall eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek YHWH will praise him.

– Psalm 22:26

He cannot see, nor can he touch, but he keeps stretching out, hoping for contact. 'whole being' translates the Hebrew *nepeš*.

It is God who keeps the heart of the psalmist alert and his eyes open, longing to see, even though he cannot find words and his experience of God is tenuous and uncertain. The psalmist struggles to make sense of what is happening to him.

**<sup>1</sup>I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, that he may hear me.**

**<sup>2</sup>In my anguish, I search for you, my Lord.**

**In the night my hand never stops reaching out; my whole being refuses to be comforted.**

**<sup>3</sup>I remember God, and I moan; I reflect, and my spirit faints.**

[Selah\*]

**<sup>4</sup>You keep my eyelids from closing; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.**

**<sup>5</sup>I consider the days of old, and remember the years of long ago.**

**<sup>6</sup>I commune within my heart\* in the night, I meditate and my spirit keeps on searching.**

The silence of God

**<sup>7</sup>Perhaps the Lord will always reject me, and will never ever turn back to me with his grace?**

**<sup>8</sup>Perhaps his kindness\* is exhausted, and his promises have come to an end?**

**<sup>9</sup>Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger\* locked up his compassion\*?**

[Selah\*]

**<sup>10</sup>And I say, 'Poor me! The right hand of the Most High has altered!'**

The psalmist's problem is that God seems to be acting contrary to how God has revealed himself to be. After all, God did proclaim to Moses:

YHWH, YHWH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

– Exodus 34:6

Where is this steadfast love, graciousness, and tender compassion now? All the psalmist experiences is silence.

Dreadful things are happening and God seems to be doing nothing about it.

Just as YHWH took delight in making you prosperous and numerous, so YHWH will take delight in bringing you to ruin and destruction; you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to possess.

– Deuteronomy 28:63

## **Part Two. A hymn celebrating the wonder of the escape from Egypt**

**<sup>11</sup>I remember the deeds of YH; yes, I recall your wonders of old.**

**<sup>12</sup>I meditate on all that you have done, and muse on your mighty deeds.**

I will recount the gracious deeds of YHWH, the praiseworthy acts of YHWH, because of all that YHWH has done for us, and the great favour to the house of Israel that he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. For he said, 'Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely'; and he became their saviour in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved his holy spirit; therefore he became their enemy; he himself fought against them. Then they remembered the days of old, of Moses his servant. Where is the one who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is the one who put within them his holy spirit, who caused his glorious arm to march at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble. Like cattle that go down into the valley, the spirit of YHWH gave them rest. Thus you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name.

– Isaiah 63:7-14 (see also Psalm 18:7-17)

In Genesis 48:5 we are told that Jacob adopted Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, thereby establishing the position of these two large tribes of the central highlands. This is an indication that this psalm originated, not in Judah, but in the northern kingdom, Israel.

The memory of God's powerful presence in the Exodus from Egypt sustains the psalmist's hope. The Gospel scenes of Jesus calming the storm (Mark 4:35-41) and walking on the sea (Mark 6:47-52) draw on the symbolism found here. We think, too, of Jesus passing through death to the risen life and opening the way for us to follow. Paul can write:

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.

– Philippians 3:10

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David – that is my gospel.

– 2Timothy 2:8

**<sup>13</sup>Your way, my God, is holy.  
What god is great like our  
God?**

**<sup>14</sup>You are the God who works  
wonders; you display your  
might among the peoples.**

**<sup>15</sup>With your strong arm you  
redeem your people, the de-  
scendants of Jacob and Joseph.**

[Selah\*]

**<sup>16</sup>When the waters saw you,  
O God, when the waters saw  
you, they were afraid;  
the very deep trembled.**

**<sup>17</sup>The clouds poured out water;  
the skies thundered; your ar-  
rows flashed on every side.**

**<sup>18</sup>The crash of your thunder  
was in the whirlwind;  
your lightning lit up the  
world; the earth trembled and  
shook.**

**<sup>19</sup>Your way was through the  
sea, your path, through the  
mighty waters; yet your foot-  
prints were unseen.**

**<sup>20</sup>You led your people like a  
flock by the hand of Moses  
and Aaron.**