

Lenten Devotional March 7, 2022

Scripture

Psalm 121

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills —
from where will my help come?

2 My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

3 He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.

4 He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

5 The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade at your right hand.

6 The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.

7 The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.

8 The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and for evermore.

Devotional

Dr. Helen Blier, Director of Continuing Education

In his book *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes*, Belden Lane wonders what it is that has drawn mystics and seekers alike to mountains and deserts. What is it about times of crisis that pull us to these stark and uncompromising places? After all, Lane says, mountains and deserts are indifferent to us. They exist whether we are there or not and, quite frankly, have no need of us. As such, he says, there's something about the sheer power and otherness of these landscapes that strips away all that is extraneous in our hearts and minds and forces us to come face to face with what is most essential.

I know something of this. A few years ago, grief hit me hard—and after enough months of trying to put one foot in front of the other, I knew I needed to do whatever it took to visit a friend in Denver so that we could hike the Rockies. As we made our way to the city from the airport, I lifted my eyes to the Front Range, pink and yellow with the mid-morning sun. Look at us, the mountains said, *Look up. Look up from your troubles and grief, up from the immediacy of what seems all-consuming.* Lift your eyes, says the psalmist—that's where your help will come from. And then it hit me: it wasn't about the hiking or even the mountains (although they are my happiest of places). It was about the looking up—and the letting go required to do it. "God can only be met in emptiness," writes Lane, "by those who come in love, abandoning all effort to control, every need to astound."

You see, the psalm isn't about the hills, or even the fact that we need help. That's only the first two lines. It's about God—God who made heaven and earth, God who is sturdy enough to hold us steady and watch over our comings and goings. The God who is greater than our troubles and deeper than our grief. These fierce landscapes reorient us—away from distractions and toward the holy one, up from the overwhelm of what troubles us and out to a broader horizon—and in doing so, they reorient us to the stories of our lives. And isn't that the task of Lent, to reorient us, to remind us to lift our eyes?

Prayer

God, remind me in this season of Lent to lift my eyes—to look beyond the troubles and know that you are there to guide my step and hold me close. And when lifting my eyes seems too hard, cup my chin gently and raise my face to yours, from this time on and forevermore. Amen.