

December 12, 2016

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Scripture

Psalm 40

- ¹I waited patiently for the LORD;
 he inclined to me and heard my cry.
- ²He drew me up from the desolate pit,
 out of the miry bog,
 and set my feet upon a rock,
 making my steps secure.
- ³He put a new song in my mouth,
 a song of praise to our God.
 Many will see and fear,
 and put their trust in the LORD.
- ⁴Happy are those who make
 the LORD their trust,
 who do not turn to the proud,
 to those who go astray after false gods.
- ⁵You have multiplied, O LORD my God,
 your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;
 none can compare with you.
 Were I to proclaim and tell of them,
 they would be more than can be counted.
- ⁶Sacrifice and offering you do not desire,
 but you have given me an open ear.
 Burnt offering and sin offering
 you have not required.
- ⁷Then I said, "Here I am;
 in the scroll of the book it is written of me.
- ⁸I delight to do your will, O my God;
 your law is within my heart."
- ⁹I have told the glad news of deliverance
 in the great congregation;
 see, I have not restrained my lips,
 as you know, O LORD.
- ¹⁰I have not hidden your saving help within my heart,
 I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation;
 I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness
 from the great congregation.
- ¹¹Do not, O LORD, withhold
 your mercy from me;
 let your steadfast love and your faithfulness
 keep me safe forever.

¹²For evils have encompassed me
without number;
my iniquities have overtaken me,
until I cannot see;
they are more than the hairs of my head,
and my heart fails me.

¹³Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me;
O LORD, make haste to help me.

¹⁴Let all those be put to shame and confusion
who seek to snatch away my life;
let those be turned back and brought to dishonor
who desire my hurt.

¹⁵Let those be appalled because of their shame
who say to me, "Aha, Aha!"

¹⁶But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation
say continually, "Great is the LORD!"

¹⁷As for me, I am poor and needy,
but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God.

Devotional

"Within our darkest night, you kindle the fire that never dies away, never dies away." This text of a song comes to us from the Taizé community in France. Generally, songs end with a stable harmonic resolution, with the final chord offering a sense of arrival, of completion. But this particular song ends with a chord that feels unresolved. Even as the song ends and our voices fall silent, this unresolved chord hangs in the air, thus filling us with the sense that there is something more to come. Advent is the time when we are filled with hope and expectation for that something more.

The Psalmist is in the pit. He is crying out for God's mercy in much the same way that we cry out in the midst of racial injustice and natural disasters and refugee crises. But the Psalmist has been pulled out of the pit before and trusts that the God who has been faithful in the past will again bring deliverance. This is our Advent hope. Remembering that God's Kingdom came into our midst long ago, we cast our gaze forward in assurance of something more to come—the fullness of that Kingdom. And so, God has put a new song in our mouths—a song of trust and hope, a song sung even (or perhaps especially) in our darkest nights.

Prayer

Almighty and most merciful God, may your Spirit kindle a light in our darkness. Give us hope in times when your Kingdom seems too distant. Even as we long for something more than this broken world, put a new song in our mouths that we may proclaim your steadfast love and faithfulness. Amen.