

Lent Devotional March 2, 2020

Scripture

Psalm 6

*1 O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger,
or discipline me in your wrath.
2 Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing;
O LORD, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror.
3 My soul also is struck with terror,
while you, O LORD—how long?
4 Turn, O LORD, save my life;
deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love.
5 For in death there is no remembrance of you;
in Sheol who can give you praise?
6 I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.
7 My eyes waste away because of grief;
they grow weak because of all my foes.
8 Depart from me, all you workers of evil,
for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping.
9 The LORD has heard my supplication;
the LORD accepts my prayer.
10 All my enemies shall be ashamed and struck with terror;
they shall turn back, and in a moment be put to shame.*

Devotional

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Written before he died July 15, 2019

Lent is serious business. And the themes of today's reading from Psalm 6, a lamentation of David, reflect the serious business of pain and suffering, fear and death. So it surprises me that the sixth Psalm was meant to be sung.

Old Testament scholars do not know the melodies indicated in the superscriptions of many of the Psalms, but consider the example of Psalm 23. I am convinced that it was set in common meter, paraphrased by the author, and set to a tune, as it was in the Scottish Psalter of 1650 and has become so familiar in the tuneful song lyrics "The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want"

But paraphrasing Psalm 6 isn't easy. One must congratulate those ancients who took its mournful phrases and made them resonate and harmonize. Psalm 6 is a complaint, a sad song sung by a choir of quite devoted holy people. In American colonial years, paraphrases were the cause of schism. Presbyterians fled from congregations who sang Isaac Watts's paraphrased psalms and repeatedly rejected such hymns as *Joy to the World* (based on Psalm 98), *Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun* (based on Psalm 72), and *O God, Our Help in Ages Past* (based on Psalm 90). They argued that these musical expressions were not the true "word of God" and thus that hymns based on *ideas* found in the Bible were unacceptable. Contemporary worshipers, on the other hand, love Watts's familiar hymns.

It strikes me as ironic how closely Psalm 6 parallels the sixth chapter of Job. Job, too, voices numerous arguments with God—arguments I might paraphrase thus:

The Almighty is at war with me.
His arrows [poisoned arrows!] pierce me.
The Lord's word is against me.
I await your instruction.
Speak and I will be silent.
Please recall that my life is a breath.
God, I will not blaspheme to your face.
Rescue me!

If you have ever been in a circumstance from which you sought deliverance, you can resonate with these words—the agony as well as the faithful pleading offered by Job and expressed by David in Psalm 6.

Prayer

Almighty God, we are in need of your deliverance. We need you to come to our rescue at the perfect moment—to invite us into the warmth and safety of your shelter from the storms of our lives. Thank you that you are behind all compassionate acts of deliverance—the true focus of the season of Lent. Amen.