**Psalm 62:1-12**

OPENING

Imagine being able to go through all the ups and down of life, and rather than feeling strained, stressed, and agitated… “find[ing] rest,” “wait[ing] in silence.” Imagine being able to face the changes that life brings, whether they are chosen or not, and rather than facing the unknown with fear and with a sense of foreboding… you are *not* “shaken” but instead you can stand firm, as if on a “rock,” or inside a “stronghold,” a storm-shelter, a fortress. Imagine! It the very picture of confidence…the definition of serenity. *“For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken.”* (Ps 62:1-2 & 5-6, NRSV)

If I’m to be honest with you, looking out at the cultural and political landscape of this coming year…I read these words, this repeated refrain and simply thought… “Yeah, right!”

And if that was your reaction also, then we, my friends, are in good company. And our Psalmist is right there with us. Frustrated and in distress when he considers the challenges of his day…but rather than allowing the sense of insurmountable struggle dictate his thinking, he *chooses* to open his song by stretching his imagination for what *could* be possible.

So, let us pray along *with* our ancient companion this morning, so that we too might envision *with them* a time when “justice [might] flow like a river, and goodness like a never-ending stream” (Amos 5:24), where security and liberation are a reality for all.

Let’s pray:

*On the spot*

TROUBLE IN THE TEXT

Throughout the Bible’s story, there is the repeated call from God’s people—particularly those experiencing enslavement, exile, oppression, poverty, or tragedy. There is a repeated cry that yearns for God to intervene. It is a cry we encounter in verse 3, *How long?*

Those enslaved in Egypt, the Israelites in Babylon, and many others called out *to God* to see and hear their suffering, and the Bible offers significant examples of God acting to do just that: rescuing and restoring the people, at times even taking revenge on their oppressors and enemies. But these rescues were usually short-lived, and so we see prophets and psalmists, continuing to point forward to a *final* intervention, when God would put an end to evil (for good) and lift up the downtrodden (for good).

This means that we have, in our Biblical text, sitting side-by-side, expressions of fear and frustration, sorrow, and lament sitting alongside expressions of hope. As illogical and fanciful as they might first appear. And through it all the continued of cry, *“How long, O God?”* Whether it’s Zechariah (Zec 1:13); or David (Ps 94:3-4); Habakkuk (Hab 1:2); Isaiah (Is 6:10); Paul (Rom 8:19-22); or Jesus (Matt 17:17; Mark 9:19) or the apostle John exiled on Patmos (Rev 6:10). *“How long, O God?”*

TROUBLE TODAY

2024 will be a monumental year in the United States (and beyond), and for far more reasons than I can list, but ALL of them are enough to ignite that ancient cry once more.

* It’s not news to you that our duly elected government (at all levels) have been and continue to operate in increasingly polarized factions, and tensions are still growing. Perceived opponents are being censored and expelled, impeachment threats loom and punitive bills are flooding the agenda. With the looming threat of authoritarianism on the horizon.[[1]](#footnote-1) Isn’t it enough to cry the words that echo through history: *How long, O God? How long?*
* We have a team at St Andrew’s assembled and mobilized around the issue of reproductive health care, hoping to discern effective response to the restrictive laws against abortion in over 20 states, even in instances of incest or rape. *How long, O God? How long?*
* We are living in a time where truth and facts are debated and dismissed. Where Artificial Intelligence/AI technology (though it can be used in many good and helpful ways) is also being used to create text and images that are nearly impossible to distinguish from reality. *How long, O God? How long?*
* We have all faced the effects of workforce shortages, particularly in areas of education, medicine/health care and criminal justice. Shortages that increase the risks of illness and death and contribute to the cycle of poverty. *How long, O God? How long?*
* Xenophobia, that is fear or prejudice of those from different countries, is informing and shaping our immigration policies in such a way that leads to the mistreatment of asylum seekers and refugees. Whole families fleeing their homes because of persecution, poverty, war, and climate disaster. *How long, O God? How long?*
* Over the past year the rights of LGBTQIA+ and gender expansive people have been under attack. Impacting their access to life-saving gender-affirming care, their ability to live and work in safe environments. We are barely through the first month of this year and already 285 anti-LGBTQ bills have been filed in legislatures across the country. *How long, O God? How long?*
* At the 100-day mark, open warfare in Israel and Palestine continues, and repeated calls for ceasefire by the international community have been ignored or dismissed, and the death toll which is already close to 25,000 rises daily. *How long, O God? How long?*
* And the laments are ongoing…in our city, across this country, and across the world, it places that are making the headlines and tens of thousands of unreported, unseen ways.

So, we find ourselves joining our voices with the ancient Psalm writers, who repeatedly call on God to intervene. To end the destruction of human lives, the greed and distrust, the lies and disregard for others. We join with the prophets of old who raised their voices to the heavens: “Don’t you see what is happening, God? Don’t you care, what is going on? *How long? How long must we wait to see improvement? When will you intervene?* [PAUSE]

LINK

And yet, in scripture, as in life itself, two things can be true at the same time. And so, as we collectively take up the prophetic cry of oppressed, we are ALSO challenging ourselves, stretching our imaginations – like the Psalmist’s before us, trusting that the world is *not* presently ordered in the way God created it or desires it. AND perhaps there are forces more powerful than destruction and death.

HOPE IN THE TEXT

Psalm 62 is a song of lament and of hope, it is a song of frustration and of faith. The writer is actively reminding himself that God’s steadfast love and power is greater than all forces that elevate human authority and exploit the weak. Though clearly disturbed by the “attacks of others,” the propensity of some to “tear other human beings down,” bringing them “low”; reveling in acts of “deception,” “cursing” and lying; acts of “violence” and exploitation–– David, our likely writer desires to find security and peace, and knows that those things can only be found in God. That in God alone, and in God’s vision alone, there is “deliverance,” there is a different pattern of being, one that doesn’t rely on human strength, wealth, or alliances.

AND YET our writer reminds us in verses 11-12 that “strength belongs *to* God, and faithful love comes *from* God.” He is reminding himself and us that although the death-dealing forces seem to have the upper hand, we are not to confuse the ease at which destruction occurs, with power. Real power is found in the strength, resilience, and a persistence of love ––of compassionate, empathetic, and hopeful love.

This Psalm does not deny or dismiss troublesome and terrible realities. Instead, it doubles-down on the belief that *love,* and *justice* can…just maybe…bring about societal transformation and liberation. It doubles-down on the belief that there is an unseen Life-Force that is actively working for justice and equality in the world.

So, David is not deceived. For although destruction abounds, destruction is not more powerful than love, peace, and harmony, destruction is just easier. He does not get it twisted, and neither should we.

HOPE FOR TODAY

This Psalm, among others, gives *us today* full permission to pour out our hearts before God, expressing our concerns and frustrations about all the injustices we see. This is the kind of prayer modelled throughout scripture. And it is the kind of prayer that doesn’t stop at leveling complaints to the sky, but leads to loving action informed by Divine justice.

Yes, we need to challenge the systems that sanction the exploitation of many for the enrichment of a few. So, we watch the bills that are working through our state legislature, make phone calls and write letters. Yes, we need work to create a more equitable society that values the well-being of all. So, we show up for supportive trans people, those seeking reproductive care and food assistance. Yes, we need to call for leaders to be held accountable for their actions and decisions, in the past, the present and the future. Yes, as people of faith and as Christian people, we demand that those in authority uphold justice and promote policies that serve the common good. AND we do so because we are convinced that the God of love and compassion, desires a world where all can flourish.

CONCLUSION

Because, rest has not yet come, security is not yet felt, destruction is still underway, hope is under attack, and truth is difficult to discern. The words in our Psalm are anticipatory words. They were for our ancient companion, and they are for us.

May this year’s cries of “How long?” ––which will come, find relief and hope in people like you, who are convinced that “strength belongs *to* God, and faithful love comes *from* God.” Amen.

1. The Hill, <https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/4337353-liz-cheney-dictatorship-trump-2024/> Accessed 1/18/24 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)