



still waters

home church studies

Psalm 51

[Worship]

1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. 4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. 5 Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. 6 You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. 9 Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Consider:

[Words]

The man who did this deserves to die, declares David, as the prophet Nathan tells him a parable that exposes David's guilt for the murder of Uriah, following his seduction and adultery with Uriah's wife Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12.5-6). Tyrants know when they have done wrong. When massacres occur—whether in the clinical holocaust of the European concentration camps, the butchery in Rwanda or Burundi, the long legacy of South

African apartheid, or the death squads of Latin America—the perpetrators cannot escape the dark knowledge of their sin.

King David holds a significant place in the story of God's dealings with humanity. His status as ancestor of the Messiah, and the comparison of his throne to the defining movement of founding the Jewish state, reveals that significance. We should perhaps not be surprised that one of the two great psalms of lament over personal sin (Psalm 51) is attributed to David's realization of the magnitude of his wickedness. Personal responsibility for wrongdoing is something we all need to face. But with forgiveness goes the steadying power of God to "create...a clean heart...and renew a right spirit" (Psalm 51.10).

Witness to the rule of God in our lives has credence when we accept Paul's injunction "to lead a life worthy of the vocation to which you were called." Individual integrity is essential to the witness of the body. Witness is to be marked by "humility, gentleness, patience, and the supporting of each other in love" (Ephesians 4.1-3). Jesus challenges us to understand that "the bread of God which comes down from heaven gives life to the world" (John 6.33), as it calls for rejection of scapegoating violence that threatens to consume humanity as it consumed King David.

Reflection and Action

How is your life worthy of the vocation to which you were called? How does your church life measure up against the virtues of humility, gentleness, supporting in love, and belief in God who gives life to the world?

[Scripture]

Ephesians 4.1-5

1 I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.