

# still waters

home church studies

## Psalm 124

[Worship]

1 If it had not been the LORD who was on our side—let Israel now say—2 if it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when our enemies attacked us, 3 then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; 4 then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; 5 then over us would have gone the raging waters. 6 Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. 7 We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped. 8 Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

### Consider: Peter B. Price

[Words]

"Anyone who is not against us is for us," says Jesus to the disciple John (Mark 9:40). The disciples had been arguing over status, and Jesus had given them a visual parable by embracing a little child, saying, "Anyone who welcomes a little child such as this...welcomes me." He continues to surprise by advising his disciples that the most basic hospitality, the "gift of a cup of water," is evidence of being "for us." An important task for God's people is discerning allies who are allies in "escaping from the fowler's net" (Psalm 124:7).

Esther is the most secular book in the scriptures. It tells of a Jewish woman who has found favor with a pagan monarch, acting to prevent the genocide of her people. Boldly risking her privileged position and status with a paranoid ruler, she achieves freedom for her people and brings about the punishment of the chief conspirator to the potential holocaust.

There is little mention of God in this story. It is unlike so much of what we read in the Old Testament. We are left to draw conclusions rather than have them thrown at us. Michael Fox has commented that it is "the willingness to face history with an openness to the possibility of providence—even when history seems to weigh against its likelihood...this is a stance of profound faith."

Elie Wiesel, commenting on a meeting of "righteous Gentiles" in New York, spoke of those who had defended Jews in the European holocaust: "Most who cared were simple people who didn't even know what they were doing was courageous.... They did it because it was the thing to do. And I felt then, woe to our society if to be human becomes an heroic act."



Jesus understood how much it takes to be a full human being. He saw the need to affirm what was "good" outside his discipleship community and to cut out what was "bad" inside it. To be like salt is to be at peace. The challenge of making shalom calls for "confession of sins to one another" within the community (James 5:16); and outside of it believing that "anyone who is not against us is for us."

### Reflection and Action

Who do you sense is "for us" but does not belong to your faith community? Where have you witnessed being human as "an heroic act"? What do you want to affirm as "good" outside, and deal with as "bad" in your church life? Re-read the Michael Fox quote. Do you agree with him?

### [Scripture]

## James 5.13-20

13 Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. 14 Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. 17 Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. 18 Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest. 19 My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, 20 you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.