

still waters

home church studies

Psalm 22 1-15

[Worship]

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? 2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest. 3 Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. 4 In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. 5 To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame. 6 But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people. 7 All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads; 8 "Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver-- let him rescue the one in whom he delights!" 9 Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast. 10 On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God. 11 Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help. 12 Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me; 13 they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. 14 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; 15 my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.

Consider: Peter B. Price

[Words]

"God has undermined my courage....I am plunged back into obscurity by him," complains Job (23:16-17). The psalmist offers a prayer full of rage and complaints against God, accusing God of forsaking, betraying, and failing to help. Bereft, he reveals the physical impact of grief and sense of despair, and finally accuses God of "laying me down in the dust of death" (Psalm 22:15). Such a sense of being lost to God is experienced by many, and one survivor of Auschwitz recalls how he fasted in the camp in order to shame God.

Most of us find such rage and anger against God hard to express. It rarely, if ever, forms part of our worship, except in the rather ersatz

form of the repeated psalm. We are scandalized by such boldness against God; we are often too timid to tell it as it is, fearing some kind of divine thunderbolt because we have dared to challenge God. We need someone to interpret for us.

The writer of Hebrews exhorts readers, "We must hold firm to our profession of faith" (Hebrews 4:14). Such words fall on deaf ears unless they are connected to the reality of suffering. We should hold on to our faith, with all its rage, despair, and confusion; fear of mockery (Psalm 22:7); and sense of futility (Mark 10:28) because "Jesus the Son of God...is not incapable of feeling our weakness with us, but has been put to the test in exactly the same way as we ourselves...apart from sin" (Hebrews 4:14-15).

Jesus is the interpreter of our pain, and challenges our comforts. As the "Word made flesh" (John 1:14), Jesus reveals our schizophrenia and "seeks out the place where soul is divided from spirit or joints from marrow" (Hebrews 4:12). Warning of the danger of riches, Jesus offers the companionship of community (Mark 10:21-22). Jesus invites us from the addictions of consumerism: to renounce the security of home, relationships, and property. By offering a new order of Jubilee, a time of re-distributive justice, he makes possible a world where "first will be last, and the last first" (Mark 10:31).



Reflection and Action

When have you experienced the despair of Job, or the anger of the psalmist? How did you express it? Where have you discovered Jesus as interpreter of your pain, offering the solace of others and the challenge to live in the spirit of Jubilee?

[Scripture]

Hebrews 4.12-16

12 Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account. 14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.