

22ND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler

READ: PSALM 43:1-5

"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?"

REFLECT:

The lectionary has set Psalm 43 for this Sunday, but I invite you to read from Psalm 42:1 to the end of Psalm 43. Many believe these two Psalms to have originated as one continuous Psalm, and when you read them together it's easy to see why. Psalm 43 seems to pick up from where Psalm 42 leaves off, and punctuating both is the repeated refrain, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted with me?"

Many commentators believe this Psalm to be set against the backdrop of exile from the temple. In 42:4 the Psalmist certainly seems to be wistfully remembering times when the community could gather for worship in the "house of God", and in 43:3-4 expresses a longing to be led "to your dwelling", "to the altar", to the place where praises are sung with the harp.

I think we can probably relate to these emotions! Some of us have recently been enjoying the first services back in our church buildings, and I know these joyful occasions have been warmly appreciated. There are those among us though who are excluded by their personal risk factors, and even for those who gather I suspect there's still an ache for the times when we we could sing God's praises together in church. Trauma theory extols the psychological benefits of naming our emotions, and naming our losses, just as the Psalmist does here.

Many of you will know that I've now begun a new job working as a hospital chaplain with the Oxford University Hospitals Trust. The team of chaplains have been very welcoming, but this continues to be a challenging time for them. Some of the team are able to come to the hospital sites and carry out their "normal" duties in limited ways. Others, due to their own health concerns, are doing what they can from home.

The team have developed an important practice to sustain and connect them. Every day at 12.15 all who are on duty, whether at home or on one of the hospital sites, pause for prayer. Sometimes together online or in one of the chapels, sometimes individually but in the knowledge that colleagues, somewhere, are praying alongside them. This week I thought I might offer us something similar. A simple compline (prayer for the end of the day) inspired by these Psalms that we can use wherever we are, in the knowledge that we're praying alongside one another, even at a distance. A prayer that gives space to name our losses, and to remember God's faithfulness.

PRAY:

As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so our souls long for you, O God.
In the busyness of today
we have longed for stillness.
In the loneliness of today
we have longed for company.
In the performance of today
we have longed to be our true selves.

Deep calls to deep:
our hearts respond to love's call.

Here, in safety and silence, we give thanks for the
day that is ending. (*silence is held*)

Here, in safety and silence, we bring our worries
and disappointments to you. (*silence is held*)

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
By day the LORD commands his steadfast love
and by night his song is with us.
You, God of life, are my help and my hope. **Amen.**

RESOURCES:

Our friends at Wheatley URC have a huge archive of online sermons you can listen to, and are regularly posting new resources on their website:
www.wheatleyurc.org.uk

SUPPORT:

Pauline and myself, and your elders, are here for you if you need someone to talk to, have a prayer request, or just fancy a chat! Ping us an email or give us a ring.