

# 24TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler

## READ: PSALM 90

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"...like grass... in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers. "

## REFLECT:

For me, this past week at work has been demanding. I've found myself in at the deep end of hospital chaplaincy, a helpless witness to grief, shock and trauma at their most raw and heart-rending. No doubt that's why this Psalm stood out to me among the lectionary options for this Sunday. Its insight that human life is fragile and fleeting rings true. The anguish and longing for relief from suffering expressed here ring true too. As we so often find in the Psalms, these are words that come from a deep place; words of honesty and courage.

I'm reminded of conversations some of us shared as we wrestled with the book of Job in our recent online Bible studies. The Psalmist here seems to attribute the suffering of the times to God's anger. Job's friends arrived at similar conclusions.

In the book of Job, God finally speaks out against the friends' explanations for Job's loss and pain. The universe doesn't run that way. Awful things happen to good people. We've no right to compound people's suffering by framing it as punishment.

And yet it seems that when things fall apart our natural response is to ask, "why?" "Why has this happened?" "Who is to blame?" "What did I do to deserve it?"

Perhaps we need to hear these questions as a heart-cry of lament. Not as an invitation to offer explanations, or correct what we may perceive as "bad theology". They are addressed to God, not to us.

As I stand, sit or crouch alongside wearing my dog-collar, feeling beyond inadequate, all I can do is hold and acknowledge the distress behind the questions. I find myself saying things like, "I don't know the answer." "There are no reasons." "You're right, this is unfair/awful/all wrong."

Amazingly, beautifully, this Psalm begins and ends with an unshaken faith in the presence of God (we see this in the book of Job, too). God who is eternal. God who is steadfast. God who hears us. God who is our dwelling place.

## CONNECT:

A little blessing for us to carry into the week ahead:

May we make our uneasy peace with the mysteries of God and the universe; the limitations of our understanding and control. May we remember our smallness. May we cherish the fleeting gift that is life. May our words be truthful and kind. May our prayers be honest and courageous. May God be our dwelling place, our beginning and end.

**Amen.**

## PRAY:

- For all whose lives have fallen apart
- For all who are grieving
- For help in ministering to those who are in distress.

## 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](http://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.

