

June 7, 2020

Psalm 88

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

(A song and a psalm by the people of Korah for the music leader.
To the tune "Mahalath Leannoth.") A special psalm by Heman the
Ezrahite.)

A Prayer When You Can't Find the Way

¹ You keep me safe, Lord God.
So when I pray at night,
² please listen carefully
to each of my concerns.

³ I am deeply troubled
and close to death;
⁴ I am as good as dead
and completely helpless.
⁵ I am no better off
than those in the grave,
those you have forgotten
and no longer help.

⁶ You have put me in the deepest
and darkest grave;
⁷ your anger rolls over me
like ocean waves.
⁸ You have made my friends turn
in horror from me.
I am a prisoner
who cannot escape,
⁹ and I am almost blind
because of my sorrow.
Each day I lift my hands
in prayer to you, Lord.
¹⁰ Do you work miracles
for the dead?
Do they stand up
and praise you?

¹¹ Are your love and loyalty
announced
in the world
of the dead?
¹² Do they know of your miracles
or your saving power
in the dark world below
where all is forgotten?

¹³ Each morning I pray

Psalm 88

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

A Song. A Psalm of the Korahites. To the leader: according to
Mahalath Leannoth. A Maskil of Heman the Ezrahite.
Prayer for Help in Despondency

¹ O Lord, God of my salvation,
when, at night, I cry out in your presence,
² let my prayer come before you;
incline your ear to my cry.

³ For my soul is full of troubles,
and my life draws near to Sheol.
⁴ I am counted among those
who go down to the Pit;
I am like those who have no help,
⁵ like those forsaken among the dead,
like the slain that lie in the grave,
like those whom you remember no more,
for they are cut off from your hand.

⁶ You have put me in the depths of the Pit,
in the regions dark and deep.
⁷ Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
and you overwhelm me with all your waves.
Selah

⁸ You have caused my companions to shun me;
you have made me a thing of horror to them.
I am shut in so that I cannot escape;
⁹ my eye grows dim through sorrow.
Every day I call on you, O Lord;
I spread out my hands to you.
¹⁰ Do you work wonders for the dead?
Do the shades rise up to praise you?
Selah

¹¹ Is your steadfast love declared in the grave,
or your faithfulness in Abaddon?
¹² Are your wonders known in the darkness,
or your saving help in the land of forgetfulness?

¹³ Each morning I pray
to you, Lord.
¹⁴ Why do you reject me?
Why do you turn from me?
¹⁵ Ever since I was a child,
I have been sick
and close to death.
You have terrified me
and made me helpless.

¹⁶ Your anger is like a flood!
And I am shattered
by your furious attacks
¹⁷ that strike each day
and from every side.
¹⁸ My friends and neighbors
have turned against me
because of you,
and now darkness
is my only companion.

¹³ But I, O Lord, cry out to you;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.
¹⁴ O Lord, why do you cast me off?
Why do you hide your face from me?
¹⁵ Wretched and close to death
from my youth up,
I suffer your terrors;
I am desperate.
¹⁶ Your wrath has swept over me;
your dread assaults destroy me.
¹⁷ They surround me like a flood all day long;
from all sides they close in on me.
¹⁸ You have caused friend and neighbor
to shun me;
my companions are in darkness.

The Book of Psalms is the prayer book of the Bible. Eugene says that it provides us with the language for prayer: our responding to the God who speaks to us. "Untutored we tend to think that prayer is what good people do when they are doing their best. It is not. Inexperienced, we suppose that there must be an 'insider' language that must be acquired before God takes us seriously in our prayer. There is not. Prayer is elemental, not advanced, language. It is the means by which our language becomes honest, true, and personal in response to God. It is the means by which we get everything in our lives out in the open before God." (from the introduction to the Psalms in *The Message*).

Psalm 88 is a challenging prayer. Martin Marty, a professor of church history at the University of Chicago, Psalm 88 is "a wintry landscape of unrelieved bleakness. Indeed, in Hebrew, the last word of the psalm is "darkness". It is often assumed that the Psalm is a sick Psalm that is to say that the praying-poet has been laid low by a disease, perhaps leprosy or some other unclean illness. Some think rather that the poet is suffering under a more general calamity. It's hard to know exactly the cause of the poet's pain. And yet that is less important than the prayers. Our prayer "stands alone in all the Psalter for the unrelieved gloom, the hopeless sorrow of its tone. Even the very saddest of the others, and the Lamentations themselves, admit some variations of key, some strains of hopefulness; here only all is darkness to the close." (*Wikipedia*)

QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- What part of today's texts grab you?
- We are in a bleak time in our nation. When many have said that they're without hope. How does this prayer-poem speak to such challenge and pain?
- Has the poet lost faith in God? How do you know?
 - How does the language of this psalm empower you to reflect upon your faith, to respond to the God who speaks faith into being (think of creation, think of John 1 in which Jesus is called the word of God).
 - How do you struggle to identify, and to speak, of God's purposeful presence in our world, and our live, today? Talk with God about what you need, want, and long for.