

July 8 th	Genesis 40	<i>66 Lord hear my prayer</i>
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Today's hymn is a modern version of Psalm 102

- 1 Lord, hear my prayer ! My cry shall come before you :
hide not your face when I am in distress.
My life burns up ; my days have lost their glory,
drifting like smoke, in pain and helplessness.
- 2 Like some wild owl among deserted ruins,
lonely I call while enemies curse on.
Tears are my drink ; God's wrath is my undoing ;
ashes my food till all my days are gone.
- 3 But you, O Lord, remain enthroned for ever ;
you will arise ; in you shall kingdoms trust.
Now is the time ; your city pleads your favour,
your servants love her stones, her very dust.
- 4 God will rebuild ! Write this to sing tomorrow ;
lips yet unformed their hallelujahs cry !
Glory will dawn upon our world of sorrow,
freeing from prison those condemned to die.
- 5 Then shall your name on Zion's hill be spoken ;
strangers shall fill Jerusalem with praise.
But as for me, my strength is bruised and broken ;
spare me, O God ; do not cut short my days !
- 6 The heavens and earth you formed in the beginning ;
these soon wear out — Lord, you remain the same !
They shall be changed ; your years endure unending ;
our children's children live to praise your name.

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In this lament, the Psalmist compares himself to a wild bird in the desert (the old translations called it a 'pelican!'), or a lonely sparrow on a rooftop. He is even tempted to blame God for his predicament.

Much of the Psalm echoes (or quotes?) themes found in other Psalms; it's obvious that the writer is steeped in

scripture. And if we are ever in a predicament like they were, then what better way to tackle it than with scripture? After all, Jesus did the same when he was tempted, he quoted God's word against the tempter. Whatever the circumstances of the Psalmist may have been, George Knight reminds us that these words could apply to millions of people in today's world- the afflicted, starving, refugees, war-weary, and more. Yet verse 3 is a turning-point of faith and hope. *'You will arise'*! The old Scottish metrical version of this Psalm actually starts there, with these words:

*'Thou shalt arise, and mercy yet
Thou to mount Zion shalt extend:
The time is come for favour set
The time when thou shalt blessing send.'*

'Arise O Lord' is another cry of the Psalmist - *'and let thine enemies be scattered'* The writer knew that the tide would turn, that God would be on the move, and that evil would be defeated. It might not be in his own lifetime, but faith knows no bounds of time, and generations to come will be blessed.

C S Lewis expressed it this way in his Narnia story:

'Aslan is on the move'

In his commentary, George Knight entitles this Psalm *'The Exile nearly at an end'*. We hope that what was true for Israel then is also true for us today, as we await the end of 'lockdown' and the Covid virus pandemic.

The Psalm starts where our prayers often end:

'O Lord hear my prayer, and let my cry come unto you'

May it be so! Amen.

Today's reading is Genesis chapter 40

Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master, the king of Egypt. Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined. The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them.

After they had been in custody for some time, each of the two men - the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison - had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own.

When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. So he asked Pharaoh's officials who were in custody with him in his master's house, 'Why do you look so sad today?'

'We both had dreams,' they answered, 'but there is no one to interpret them.'

Then Joseph said to them, 'Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams.'

So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream. He said to him, 'In my dream I saw a vine in front of me, and on the vine were three branches. As soon as it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes. Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup and put the cup in his hand.'

'This is what it means,' Joseph said to him. 'The three branches are three days. Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your

position, and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon.'

When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given a favourable interpretation, he said to Joseph, 'I too had a dream: on my head were three baskets of bread. In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head.'

'This is what it means,' Joseph said. 'The three baskets are three days. Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and impale your body on a pole. And the birds will eat away your flesh.'

Now the third day was Pharaoh's birthday, and he gave a feast for all his officials. He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials: he restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh's hand - but he impaled the chief baker, just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation.

The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.

Joseph's earlier dreams about his family and how own superiority over them had got him into a predicament. Now, however, his chance to explain the dreams of other people are the start of his rise to freedom and power.

However, his is still there, as he says to the two men *'Interpretation belongs to God; tell me your dreams'*! Is he putting himself in God's place, or just acknowledging that only God can give an explanation? We might (mis)quote to him the words of Jesus' critics: *'Who can interpret dreams, but God alone?'*

In any case, Joseph's explanations of the dreams are soon fulfilled: the baker gets his punishment, and the butler is exonerated. But had Joseph hoped for some reward, he was to be disappointed. The butler went back to his high position as the Pharaoh's cup-bearer, but promptly forgot all about the person who had predicted it.

How typical of human nature! Not just forgetfulness, but ingratitude. When Jesus healed ten sick people, only one came back to thank him. Is 10% an average score of human gratitude? Perhaps sometimes it's even less. How often do we pray to ask God for something, and when the prayer is answered, we carry on without a word of thanks. Paul tells us that prayer should involve asking, but also giving thanks to God (Philippians 4:6). As the modern hymn puts it:

*Give thanks with a grateful heart,
Give thanks to the Holy One.
Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ,
His Son.
And now let the weak say, I am strong,
Let the poor say, I am rich
Because of what the Lord has done for us.
Give thanks.*

Prayer from *'Spill the Beans'*

Lord, as we want for very little materially in our western world, others are in great need worldwide.

Though the sparrow may not fall without your knowledge, many of our brothers and sisters fall unnoticed through all too many ordinary, everyday needs.

We take our daily needs for granted, yet lack of food or lack of water brings too many to their untimely end.

We take our homes for granted, yet lack of home or lack of security brings death by the thousand.

Oh Lord, how long must it be so that good people, children, parents, grandparents, must tolerate and endure such an unfair world.

How long will it go on that billions go without the basics, whilst billionaires increase their wealth year on year.

Hear our cries, oh Lord, for justice.

Hear our cries, oh Lord, for fairness.

Hear our cries, oh Lord, for the forgotten people of our modern world,

your children, members of our human family.

And amongst us too, God, there is pain and plight.

We think of our community where food banks are in use, or where homes are threatened by financial constraint.

We think of the strain upon our health services, or those who feel isolated and alone.

We think of those who have lost loved ones to death, and feel lost in their grief now themselves.

For your Church, world and people we pray.

In your mercy, Lord, hear our prayer. Amen