

PSALM 131 TRUST QUIETLY

Today we begin to study the psalms that help us to return to our routine lives where God also reigns. We are about to leave Jerusalem and engage our ordinary lives. We want the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to inform and deepen our everyday journey even as we leave it behind.

So Psalm 131, the twelfth in the series, signals to us how we should begin to disengage from Jerusalem and return to world of pain and derision, of joy and happiness that is our everyday world.

It is a the psalm of an individual who witnesses in the community about how they are preparing themselves after having been in the presence of God, experienced God's unremitting love and forgiveness, found hope and now takes up the posture of waiting.

The other thing that can be said is that verse 2 (espec. 2c NRSV) indicates the poet is a woman. Women wrote a great deal of scripture (Exodus 15.20-21; 1Sam 2.1-10; Jdt 16.1-7; Lk 1.47-55). She is now preparing herself and her child for the long journey home at the end of the pilgrimage.

Three things I will avoid 1

I will she says avoid pride. Pride is destructive. It is the primal sin. Like Hannah she longs to be free of such arrogance 1 Sam 2.3 and longs to expel it from her thoughts. Pride begins in the hidden recesses of the heart but it is destructive of all human endeavour.

She will avoid all anxious desire to please which could destroy her life; her eyes are not lifted up.

She will avoid inappropriate ambition, things too marvellous for her. Her heart would be profoundly disturbed as any human heart is

when it is driven by an ambition that centres on the self and not on God's reign.

All of the above tempt her. She consciously refuses them. She is a person in very difficult circumstances, highly socially constrained. She has little freedom in our modern sense. But she makes a choice, a spiritual choice, a moral choice.

We have considerably more choice available to us need to take note here.

The one thing I have done 2

She has calmed her soul. What she wants as she returns, a dangerous journey with a small child, is a calmness of soul, a peace of mind and heart, that her circumstances will not immediately afford her. She will make the choice that her highly restrictive circumstances will be the place where she will find the calm soul.

She does not tell us how she has done that. Did she have a self-help book she bought in a Christian book store in the Temple? We want techniques and are disappointed. All she gives us is a picture.

It is the metaphor that gives us the clue. The image of the weaned child, not an infant at the breast, is very telling. The child has found acceptance and satisfaction, security and nurture with the mother and now returns to the mother's loving embrace.

The mother has found such security with God and returns to God as a child returns to its mother.

In that picture I find hope for us all 3

Now she addresses Israel, the nation, the whole community and witnesses to what she has found. If Israel wants to find hope then they need to look to the actions of a highly constrained woman and

her relationship her child and her with God (Deut 1.31; Isa 66.13; Jer 31.20; Hos 11.1-9). That probably was not a very welcome message.

The vulnerable God whose choices are restricted by the rebellious stance of the wicked (129.1-2) and by the iniquities of Gods' own people (130) will lovingly embrace God's children, including both the victims of pain and those who by their iniquities have inflicted pain on others and God. Such incomprehensible behaviour is the hope of Israel, the hope of the individual and the hope of the world.

Further reflection

We have found another metaphor for God today- the compassionate mother, source of security, who although regularly pained, frustrated and fatigued by her own children, welcomes them back into her arms and bears them along a difficult way.

This woman lived in a patriarchal society and her sense of being at the bottom of the pile along with her children is no doubt strong. But in her constrained life she chooses. In what she chooses, the rule of God in her life, she finds peace, acceptance, and security in an environment where she has none of those things. That is why she is such a powerful image for a tormented Israel.

This psalm does not justify oppression in any form. It simply tackles the reality of life as people lived it. In that reality hope, acceptance, love are possible because that is what God wants for all humans, male and female.

It is important to recognise how much a remarkable reversal took place when the Gospel came and women assumed leadership roles in the church. The Gospel reversed the effects of the Fall and declared what is hidden in this psalm; that we are all equal before God (Ac 18,26; Rom 16.1; 1Cor 16.19; Gal 3.28-29).

The only proper master of humans is God. Recognising God's rule does not mean setting up patterns of domination, but a community of brothers and sisters who are mutually servants, each of the other. There hopefully we can forgo pride and self-serving ambition and find the calm spirit, the quiet soul that rests in the vulnerable God.

Question

Pride, haughtiness and seeking after great and wondrous things do not provide calm and quiet. What does? (Mark 10.13-16; Philippians 2.1-11)