

## **"Longing to Commune with God"**

July 7, 2019 ~ Pentecost 4C ~ SACRED EARTH, SACRED WORK

Rev. Rebekah Sweet

### **Psalm 42 (NRSV) Longing for God and His Help in Distress**

- 1 As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.  
2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
    When shall I come and behold the face of God?  
3 My tears have been my food day and night,  
    while people say to me continually, "Where is your God?"  
4 These things I remember, as I pour out my soul:  
    how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house  
    of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving,  
    a multitude keeping festival.  
5 Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
    and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help 6 and my God.  
    My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you  
    from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.  
7 Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts;  
    all your waves and your billows have gone over me.  
8 By day the Lord commands his steadfast love,  
    and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.  
9 I say to God, my rock, "Why have you forgotten me?  
    Why must I walk about mournfully because the enemy oppresses me?"  
10 As with a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me,  
    while they say to me continually, "Where is your God?"  
11 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within  
    Me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
    my help and my God.

### ***Longing to Commune with God***

In the last two decades, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on the necessity of having direction and motivation in life. The popularity of Rick Warren's "Purpose Driven Life," and related titles proves that. We are told that those who aim at nothing will achieve just that. And, there are

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those who have been gifted to accomplish much in life, but who never pursue that goal. There are others on a seemingly relentless quest for that which fills the soul with virtuous living!

Psalm 42 is the first of our recorded psalms that was not written by David. We don't know much about the circumstances behind these Psalms. The Hebrew title says it is a Maskil, or “contemplative poem” by “the sons of Korah.” These were a family of temple singers who are credited with writing eleven of our Psalms. The Psalmist is in exile, he is unable to worship in his beloved temple, and he is being taunted by his captors, saying that God has abandoned him. It is not that the Psalmist doesn't *know* God, but in these desperate conditions, he is beginning to fear that God will not hear his cry and save him.

There is an ancient tale from India about a young man who was seeking God. He went to a wise old sage for help. “How can I find God?” he asked the old man.

The old man took him on a journey to a nearby river. Out they waded into the deep water. Soon the water was up just under their chins. Suddenly the old man seized the young man by the neck and pushed him under the water. He held the young man down until the young man was flailing in the water in desperation. Another minute and he may well have drowned. Up out of the water the two of them came. The young man was coughing water from his lungs and still gasping for air.

Reaching the river bank he asked the man indignantly, “What did that have to do with my finding God?” The old man asked him quietly, “While you were under the water, what did you want more than anything else?” The young man thought for a minute and then answered, “I wanted air! I wanted air more than anything else!” The old man replied, “When you want God as much as you wanted air, you will find God!”

“As the deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God!”

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Do **WE** have that kind of desire to find the God who saves our very lives? ‘To commune with God? ‘To be embraced by God? God is not far from us. God isn’t playing “hard to find.” God is revealed in truth, love, and grace, incarnate in the form of Jesus Christ who died and was resurrected with the purpose of being known to us! ***But do we have a passion to know this saving God?***

Now, we all know God, to one degree or another. That is why we are here! And most of us know that when negative circumstances erase our normal patterns of worship and participation in the family of faith, sometimes then our fears begin to overshadow our faith. When the diagnosis is worse than one had imagined, when the rock in one’s life suddenly dies, when one is no longer surrounded by all that is familiar, it may seem like our compassionate, caring God is far, far away. We’ve heard the truth before, and need to be reminded again: When it seems that God is far away, it is not God that moved!

I love the way Leslie Brandt paraphrases parts of this Psalm saying:

*As a desert wanderer longs for springs of cool water,  
So my thirsty soul reaches out for You, O God.  
How I long for a deeper sense of Your presence,  
For a faith that will embrace You without fear or doubt!*

*I remember the stories of Your love that I had been taught;  
How merciful and all-powerful were Your dealings  
With Your children throughout history!  
Yet now my heart is empty, and waves of doubt flood over my soul.*

*O foolish heart, why do you seethe in unrest?  
God has not changed, God’s love for me is ever the same.  
I must renew my faith in God;  
I must again shout God’s praises even when I don’t feel God’s presence.  
For truly God is my Help and my Hope.*

Mark Miller set to music words discovered in Cologne, Germany, scratched in a basement wall by a Jew hiding from the Nazis. These words,

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found below a star of David, convey the undying truth that God is our Help and our Hope. I will sing a portion of this piece as our closing prayer:

*I believe in the sun; I believe in the sun,  
Even when, even when it's not shining.*

*I believe in love; I believe in love,  
Even when, even when I don't feel it.*

*I believe in God; I believe in God,  
Even when, even when God is silent.*