

Psalm 95 The Message (MSG)

1\_2 Come, let's shout praises to God,  
raise the roof for the Rock who saved us!  
Let's march into God's presence singing praises,  
lifting the rafters with our hymns!

3\_5 Why? Because God is the best,  
In one hand, God holds deep caves and caverns,  
And in the other hand grasps the high mountains.  
God made the ocean and sculpted the Earth!

6\_7 So come, let us worship: down  
on our knees before God, who made us!  
Oh yes, we're God's people, the flock fed in the pastures.

7\_11 Drop everything and listen, listen as God speaks:  
"Don't turn a deaf ear as in the Bitter Uprising,  
As on the day of the Wilderness Test,  
when your ancestors turned and put me to the test.  
For forty years they watched me at work among them,  
And over and over they tried my patience.  
And I was provoked—oh, was I provoked!  
'Can't they keep their minds on God for five minutes?  
Do they simply refuse to walk down my road?'  
Exasperated, I exploded,  
'They'll never get where they're headed,  
never be able to sit down and rest.'"

As I have shared freely often, one of my passions is genealogy. I am curious about our roots, especially when I can get to know some of my long gone ancestors and get a feel for who they were, and what they were like. Al and I have submitted our DNA to several companies in order to find some of our distant cousins. And in doing so, I have been blessed to meet some cousins that I never knew before. With several of them, I have felt an immediate affinity and connection. Recently I met a 3<sup>rd</sup> cousin who

lives in Texas. Though we'd never known each other before, we felt immediately comfortable. And blessing of blessings, she has a daughter and her partner and two young kids who live in Novato. Such a precious family!!! And so close by that I get to share her grandkids.... yeah!!!

Did you realize that we humans are at least 99.5% alike. I have a niece who is so much like me that sometimes it's spooky. All life contains the same amino acids that are life giving substances. The point is... We humans are so alike. And yet we quibble and scuffle and hassle over the .5%. We are so much alike that on a very basic, deep level, when our hearts are open, we can identify with each other. When someone is hurting, we get it. When someone is hungry, we know what that feels like. We all need love and care and attention. We need shelter and comfort. And just like our brothers and sisters and our ancestors of old, we seek information to help us understand the workings of the cosmos, because life can feel pretty overwhelming and confusing. So we seek meaning that gives us answers and explanations for the great mysteries that surround us. For many of us, the great mystery is what we call the God of our understanding... and this understanding can vary wildly between us.... being one of the greatest sources of misunderstanding that we humans squabble about. We are biologically and socially so similar, but we forget.

One of the ancient texts that many have turned over the years is the book of Psalms. The Psalms express our reverence and longing and love and gratitude for the creator of our vast universe. When I was a child, I developed my faith with help from my parents, and from my Sunday school teachers. I learned that the Psalms were written by King David, the same man who as a boy slew the giant Goliath with his sling shot. I didn't know yet the depth of the greater David story, his weaknesses and his strengths, his fallibility and his courage. Like us, he was an imperfect,

flawed person, who in spite of it all or maybe because of it.... had a deep, abiding faith in God.

Today scholars tell us that the Psalms were actually written by several writers over a long period of time at least 700 years ago, much longer than one man's life span. The earliest psalms are at least 3000 years old, with the most recent written about 2500 years ago give or take. They have been used for many years during times of worship... as we can see in the psalter in our hymnal. These ancient prayers and songs were cherished and special... and still are, because they speak to us all. We identify with the sentiments and feelings. We too have many questions - Why? When? What? How? Who? ... and even us moderns who have the internet at our fingertips and can Google a question.... and receive far more than we ever wanted to know.... we still want holy answers.... sacred responses when we are puzzled or frustrated.

We long for holy connection and can find this in the Psalms

Psalm 42

When we are frustrated and overwhelmed, we are sometimes looking for explanations of what appears to be God's absence

or... maybe when unexplainable things happened.... maybe that was God.

When we don't feel the direct influence of God in our lives, we ask as we read in Psalm 13: 1-2 "How long will you forget me, Lord: How long will you hide your face from me? How long will I be left to my own wits, agony filling my heart? ... Answer me God!"

When circumstances aren't going well, we wonder, did we anger God?

Like this mornings Psalm 95 - as God is speaking,

“...For forty years they watched me at work among them,  
And over and over they tried my patience.  
‘Can’t they keep their minds on God for five minutes?  
Do they simply refuse to walk down my road?’

Exasperated, I exploded,  
“They’ll never get where they’re headed,  
never be able to sit down and rest.””

When prayers appear to go unanswered, we plea for support  
Psalm 4: 1 “Answer me when I cry out, my righteous God! Save me from  
from my troubles! Have mercy on me! Listen to my prayer!

Sometimes we know we ask for forgiveness.

Psalm 51 Have mercy on me, God, according to your faithful love!

1 Wipe away my wrongdoings according to your great compassion!

2 Wash me completely clean of my guilt;  
purify me from my sin!

3 Because I know my wrongdoings,  
my sin is always right in front of me.

7 Purify me with hyssop and I will be clean;  
wash me and I will be whiter than snow.

8 Let me hear joy and celebration again;  
let the bones you crushed rejoice once more.

9 Hide your face from my sins;  
wipe away all my guilty deeds!

10 Create a clean heart for me, God;  
put a new, faithful spirit deep inside me!

11 Please don’t take your holy spirit away from me.

At times our lives can feel wildly off kilter, manic with joy and excitement  
or depressed with anxiety. Our faith helps us to find a balance, and the

support we need to navigate life's ever present highs and lows. The psalms can offer this scaffolding.

And when all is going well, we bubble and overflow with gratitude as in Psalm 9: 1-2 "I will thank you , Lord with all my heart; I will talk about all your wonderful acts. I will celebrate and rejoice in you."

Or Psalm 63

God! My God! It's you—

I search for you!

My whole being thirsts for you!

My body desires you

in a dry and tired land,

2 Yes, I've seen you in the sanctuary;

I've seen your power and glory.

3 My lips praise you

because your faithful love

is better than life itself!

4 So I will bless you as long as I'm alive;

I will lift up my hands in your name.

And gratefully... we are reminded that we are known by God

Psalm 139

You know me.

2 You know when I sit down and when I stand up.

Even from far away, you comprehend my plans.

3 You study my traveling and resting.

You are thoroughly familiar with all my ways.

4 There isn't a word on my tongue, Lord,

that you don't already know completely.

5 You surround me—front and back.

You put your hand on me.

13 You are the one who created my innermost parts;  
you knit me together while I was still in my mother's womb.  
14 I give thanks to you that I was marvelously made.

We find connection to God and to our fellows and forgiveness and joy and celebration and pain and longing all in the Psalms.

Psalms, sacred songs and hymns and poems are still being written today. Poets, preachers, musicians and teachers, many writers offer wisdom and comfort that help us to ride the waves of our days.

Jan Richardson offers us a psalm about our holy connection  
When We Breathe Together

This is the blessing  
we cannot speak  
by ourselves.

This is the blessing  
we cannot summon  
by our own devices,  
cannot shape  
to our purpose,  
cannot bend  
to our will.

This is the blessing  
that comes  
when we leave behind  
our aloneness  
when we gather

together  
when we turn  
toward one another.

This is the blessing  
that blazes among us  
when we speak  
the words  
strange to our ears

when we finally listen  
into the chaos  
when we breathe together  
at last.

Our DNA is the code of life that we share. We are way more alike than not. When we forget, when we feel ourselves drifting apart or floundering, sacred writings can be an anchor that sets our feet back on holy ground. No matter what happens to us and around us, we're mostly alike, brothers and sisters on this journey. We all seek comfort and strength. We all express our gratitude. We all long for renewed hope for the today and for the future. Our ancient scriptures still speak to us today.... and thankfully, other psalmists continue to write from the heart and echo these ancient texts, helping us to live well and courageously for today.

I close with a prayer from Bishop Karen Oliveto -

Today my heart is breaking. In spite of the beauty around me, this beauty is being eroded day by day, by society's growing lack of civility, empathy, and connection. In a world grown smaller by social media, we have erected walls of intolerance and insensitivity that heightens division. We have created a hierarchy of suffering which ultimately will not serve to lessen anyone's

suffering, because God created us to be communal beings, connected to each other in deep and profound ways through the mystery of the Holy Spirit.

My heart may be breaking, but my resolve to live into Love's power is growing. May Love guide my steps, inspire my voice, and equip me for the hard work ahead. My heart is breaking, but Love has me clinging to Hope. Give me strength, O God. Give me strength.

Amen and Amen

Mary Oliver

Wild Geese

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees

For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body

love what it loves.

Tell me about your despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain

are moving across the landscapes,

over the prairies and the deep trees,

the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,

are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,

the world offers itself to your imagination,

calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting —

over and over announcing your place

in the family of things.