

Thursday February 18

Psalm 42 – a personal lament

- 1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.
- 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?
- 3 My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, “Where is your God?”
- 4 These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.
- 5 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and
- 6 my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.
- 7 Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.
- 8 By day the LORD directs his love, 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 go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?”
- 10 My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, “Where is your God?”
- 11 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

Today, another psalm of LAMENT - Psalm 42. It starts like this: “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. “ If you followed yesterday’s suggestion of choosing a psalm of lament to shout out to God, it might have been this one. If you can think back to the last time you were in a church service, you might have sung it, or one of the hymns based on it, such as “As pants the hart for cooling streams” or “As the deer pants for the water”.

I chose yesterday’s psalm as a way for us all to lament – a community lament, if you like. But your sorrows can also be intensely personal. Psalm 42 comes from the lips of someone a long way from home and community, from family and friends, and he keeps complaining, “Why do I go about mourning?”

There are times when I feel like that. My wife and I are blessed with good friends and neighbours, and we can get together with them, sort of, thanks to Zoom – one of those words that’s come into its own recently. But our family is in Yorkshire, and we haven’t seen them since Christmas 2019. That’s 14 months ago now. When *will* we be able to see them again? We just don’t know. We are so sad about this; and millions of other people are in the same position, feeling just the same as us.

So if this rings bells with you today, and you are painfully aware of being separated from those you love, perhaps this psalm will help you put it all into words. So open your bible again and read it – read it out loud – with feeling. Don’t be embarrassed!

If you do, you might be struck by the closing words: “Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.” Yes, things *will* change, we just don’t know when. In the bible, passages of lament often end on a note of hope. That’s important because it helps us not to fall into pits of self-pity that we can’t climb out of. But we’ll have to wait, and come back to that – to the theme of HOPE - further on in this journey through Lent 2021.