

## 02 October 2022: Psalm 37:1-10 (Proper 22)

Today we concentrate on the Psalm. Sunday by Sunday, and during the week if one follows the Prayer Book Daily Lectionary, we pray the Psalms, as Christians have done for 2000 years. However, we can become so accustomed that we unintentionally consider a Psalm as ecclesiastical elevator music—a brief interlude while going from one thing to the next. A Psalm is as much a reading from the Scriptures as the Old Testament, Epistle or Gospel Readings.

Today's Psalm, 37:1-10 speaks to the condition of envy, bitterness, and resentment that is such a potent spiritual poison. Three times the Psalmist bids us: *Do not fret yourself—Do not fret yourself because of evildoers (v1a); ...do not fret yourself over the one who prospers...who succeeds in evil schemes (v8); ...do not fret yourself; it leads only to evil (v9b).* The Hebrew word translated 'fret' is from a root word that means 'to heat up.' Envy, bitterness, resentment, indignation, anger 'heat us up' but the heat is self-indulgent and vain. The Psalm reminds us that keeping ourselves fixed on the eternal puts the momentary in perspective. The Psalmist is not saying exploitation is acceptable, greed inconsequential, or wrong tolerable. We are reminded sin is merely mortal, having no lasting existence.

The Psalm focuses on what we are to focus on—not the power of evil, but the eternal reality of God's mercy. While the Psalm reminds us of the consequences of sin—they will *wither...fade away...be cut off*, half the Psalm testifies to the eternal. The first set of eternals are in verse three: *Put your trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and feed on its riches.* Literally the first admonition is 'shepherd' or 'chase' trust. The sense is to rely on and seek God in all circumstances. There is added, *do good*. Faith is a verb, trust in God put into action in our daily lives. Faith is not a set of principles with which we agree theoretically but a way of life lived with consistency and integrity. Envy, anger, and resentment are incompatible with faith because they betray a lack of reliance on God's eternal Being.

Also, in the third verse we are challenged to *dwell in the land and feed on its riches*. Here we are called to be rooted: we live our faith in God's ways, God's future, God's making things right here and now, in the circumstances in which we are. It is a distraction to think there is a better place, better time, better circumstance in which we will really follow Jesus. We are given this place, this time, this life as it is. Yet by surrendering to God today, here, now we will find the riches God has for us.

In verse four we find: *Take delight in the Lord, and he shall give you your heart's desire.* God yearns for intense personal relationship with you. We 'delight' in what we love, what brings us joy through personal encounter. Faith is longing for relationship with the God who loves us, knowing that God even loves our incapacity to love as God loves. God yearns to give us our true heart's true desire—to be engulfed in God's love.

Next in verse 5 we are told: *Commit your way to the Lord and put your trust in him, and he will bring it to pass.* This is profound. As we pledge and continue to pledge our integrity, our honor, our well-being to God's ways, relying on God's goodness to us and all, God the Holy Spirit renews and strengthens us for yet more trustful commitment. Faith is not do-it-yourself; by faith we grow in faith, through the Holy Spirit.

Verse 6: (God) *will make your righteousness as clear as the light and your just dealing as the noonday.* St. Francis reportedly said, "Preach the Gospel always; if necessary, use words." Our best witness is not the words we say about God but the lives we live in and for God. This, too, is only possible with God at work in us and through us.

Lastly, verse 7: *Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.* This stillness is not just the absence of words but a calming of the heart, soul, mind, and body, resting in God. This is especially crucial in one's attitude toward 'evildoers,' 'those who do wrong,' who 'succeed in evil schemes.' One may rightly assess their culpability, but you and I are not God, whose justice to all, including us, will be perfectly just and perfectly merciful. Evelyn Underhill wrote: "There is but one outer test of true faith—the incessant production of good works"; there is but one inner test (of truth faith)—patience." Be still, love God, live the Faith, condemn no one, be patient with others and yourself.

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, for ever and ever. Amen.