



Lent reflection for March 14, 2025

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Psalms 22: 9-21 & 28-31

*Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
you kept me safe on my mother's breast.
On you I was cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.
Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.*

*Many bulls encircle me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.*

*I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.*

*For dogs are all around me;
a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shrivelled;
I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over me;
they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.
But you, O Lord, do not be far away!
O my help, come quickly to my aid!
Deliver my soul from the sword,
my life from the power of the dog!
Save me from the mouth of the lion!*

*To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
and I shall live for him.
Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord,
and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it.*

Today's reflection if from Alastair Boag:

I once was encircled - not by bulls - but by angry cows. My godfather, who had sent twelve year old me on a walk with his dog while he was busy had predicted the encounter. 'There are cows in that field and they will probably find you fascinating. Do not run, whatever you do! If they surround you, simply keep going and swing your stick around your head and they will get the message.' They circled, I swung, the cows read the field, as it were, and I lived to tell the tale.

The psalmist here does not have a stick. Their vulnerability is extreme. Everything around them is sharp and dangerous - biting dogs, razor-toothed lions, swords. And their clothes are being taken from them, gambled away before their face, so that they gradually become more naked. The encircling evildoers affect everything, and the consequences of the constantly threatened attack is described elementally - the psalmist has been poured out like water, fire is melting their heart, they are laid in the dust of the earth. And who has laid them there? Interestingly, 'you' have - in other words God has. Earlier, acknowledgement has been made that 'since my mother bore me you have been my God' - that the psalmist belongs to God is not in doubt - has never been in doubt. But where is God now? And why does God seem to be at least 'far away' and at worst contributing to the suffering.

This is the lament. Why have I been forsaken? Why have I been left to suffer? At its broadest, how can this have come to pass? And that feels like a question for right now, of course. There is fear here and there is imbalance, things have swung off course very badly - and that feels true.

Completing the elemental quartet - we have had water, fire and earth - the psalmist uses the air of their breath to call to God to be less far away, to quickly come and help. It's oddly vague, and it feels tentative but that is the nature of hope, I guess. What is happening is awful, and we lament having to suffer, but if we belong to God, if our hope is indeed in the Lord, then we have to cry out, we have to focus on getting balance back through our relationship with God, no matter how separated from God we feel. It will not be easy and our weak hope can but cling to the desire to 'live for him', and to the longing that one day we will be able to feel delivered and we will gladly proclaim that it is God who has done it.

Suffering and hope - back then, now, in the future ... that pairing is in focus here. Through it, this Lent, let's pray for stronger faith and even wider love.



Alastair has been coming to Holy Apostles for two years and loves it! He writes and performs and directs - and is in the process of discerning next steps having stopped teaching last summer.