

Advent Psalms | Longing for the Humble King

“Give the King Your Justice, O God”

Psalm 72

12.17.23

A Psalm of Solomon. Give the king Your judgments, O God, And Your righteousness to the king's son. ² May he judge Your people with righteousness And Your afflicted with justice. ³ Let the mountains bring peace to the people, And the hills, in righteousness. ⁴ May he vindicate the afflicted of the people, Save the children of the needy And crush the oppressor.

⁵ Let them fear You while the sun endures, And as long as the moon, throughout all generations. ⁶ May he come down like rain upon the mown grass, Like showers that water the earth. ⁷ In his days may the righteous flourish, And abundance of peace till the moon is no more.

⁸ May he also rule from sea to sea And from the River to the ends of the earth. ⁹ Let the nomads of the desert bow before him, And his enemies lick the dust. ¹⁰ Let the kings of Tarshish and of the islands bring presents; The kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts. ¹¹ And let all kings bow down before him, All nations serve him.

¹² For he will deliver the needy when he cries for help, The afflicted also, and him who has no helper. ¹³ He will have compassion on the poor and needy, And the lives of the needy he will save. ¹⁴ He will rescue their life from oppression and violence, And their blood will be precious in his sight; ¹⁵ So may he live, and may the gold of Sheba be given to him; And let them pray for him continually; Let them bless him all day long.

¹⁶ May there be abundance of grain in the earth on top of the mountains; Its fruit will wave like the cedars of Lebanon; And may those from the city flourish like vegetation of the earth. ¹⁷ May his name endure forever; May his name increase as long as the sun shines; And let men bless themselves by him; Let all nations call him blessed.

¹⁸ Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, Who alone works wonders. ¹⁹ And blessed be His glorious name forever; And may the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen, and Amen.

²⁰ The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.

The great English writer and thinker, who had a big influence on C.S. Lewis, G.K. Chesterton ... reacted to the over-polite, stodgy advice often given by British “mums” in the Post-Victorian Era: “*Religion and politics don't belong in polite conversation?*” Chesterton’s reaction: “I never discuss anything else except politics and religion. There is nothing else to discuss.” (G.K. Chesterton, *The Illustrated London News*; November 5, 1927). Maybe a more modern twist of that old English adage is, “I never MIX religion and politics.”

Well, today, in what, I think you’ll agree, in what is an unusual move for US in a Sunday morning sermon, I plan to talk about nothing except politics and religion. As we think about these *Psalms of Advent*, today’s Psalm (72) as suggested in the *Common Lectionary*, is unavoidably political and religious.

We're gearing up, as a nation, for the *Iowa Caucuses* on January 15 (they mark the start of the *Presidential Primary Season* — less than a month from now) and after THAT, watch out! We'll be OFF AND RUNNING. That is to say, for the next year you are EITHER going to go into hiding OR you'll be besieged by politics "ad nauseam" (i.e., until you become sick). So, today, we'll mix politics and religion.

We'll find this poem from the Hebrew Bible conforms to the form of government in Ancient Israel (and most of the Ancient Near East) and THAT was NOT Capitalism NOR Socialism nor Communism but Monarchy, the REIGN of a monarch, a king or queen.

In unpacking this poem about the ideal government we'll see:

- 1) SIGNS We NEED This Reign**
- 2) A Gently FALLING Reign**
- 3) Responding to the RIGHT Reign**

We need only look around to see the signs that things are NOT the way they're supposed to be. I say this, even in the US. The upcoming presidential election will likely (and ANYTHING can happen) but likely between two candidates – one of whom has been impeached (twice) the other who is currently facing an impeachment inquiry.

Most nations in the world face political corruption on a large scale. Some of our congregation come from countries that are choked by political corruption at virtually every level of government.

You may be more of a "law and order" person OR you may be a person anxious about police infringement and governmental overreach.

We could, of course, reduce government corruption if we simply got rid of government. That's called Anarchy: everyone simply minds his or her own business and then we don't need government ... and don't have to deal with governmental corruption. BUT one problem with Anarchy is that everyone WON'T mind his/her own business.

The reason we will ALWAYS need government on planet earth and what's highlighted IN this poem is that the strong take advantage of the weak. As far as I can tell, the purpose of government is to protect life, liberty and property especially for weak and vulnerable members of society.

The signs of our NEED for a reign that's RIGHT and GOOD are repeated in this psalm – words like, *afflicted* (i.e., the damaged and debilitated), the *needy* (those without resources), the *oppressed* (i.e., people being dominated and hurt by the strong); v. 9 those threatened by *enemies*, *the needy*, afflicted, v. 12 "him who has no helper" (he's thinking of orphans, widows, immigrants), v. 13 (again) "*the poor and needy*" and v. 14 those harmed by "*oppression, violence and bloodshed*".

Whether David wrote this poem FOR Solomon or Solomon wrote it (more likely), both those kings attempted to structure a just society that addressed these ills. The middle word of this poem in Hebrew

is in v. 10, "Sheba" (68 words before and 68 words after) as if the writer saw the highpoint of Ancient Israel's empire in that moment when the Queen of Sheba visited Jerusalem and saw the peace and prosperity under Solomon's reign.

David did, at points, let power go to his head. He "sent" this one here and that one there and when kings go out to war, he lingered about the palace... looking down on HIS Kingdom and HIS sheep (2 Sam 11.1-8).

And... tragically Solomon got lost and ended up laying a heavy burden on the people he was leading (1 Kings 12) and that led to a divided kingdom and a long civil war and the SERIES OF SUCCESSIONS we've been reading about on Sunday mornings through the Fall. Each new king came with new oppression and violence toward the past regime. There was no lasting, durable peace or prosperity.

And so, the Psalmist writes (is this Solomon writing about himself? ... seems a little odd), he writes and prays (v. 6) for a humble king asking (v. 6), "*May he come down like rain upon the new grass, like showers on the earth.*"

What does that mean, "May he come down..."? Come down from where? "Come down off your high horse, your majesty!" We think of Solomon who went down into the trenches and settled that dispute between the two prostitutes over whose baby had lived and whose died (1st Kings 3.16ff) We could say Solomon "came down" to the people.

And we think of David before Solomon, who came down to the sheepfolds – he was no privileged aristocrat. He was a street-sweeper, a shepherd. And when the Ark of the Covenant came into Jerusalem David showed his true colors – he danced like a sweaty construction worker to the joy of the people and to the shame of his proper wife (2 Sam 6.16). "*He distributed to everyone of Israel, both man and woman, to everyone a loaf of bread and a portion of meat and a raisin cake.*" (1 Chr. 16.3) David came down – refreshing, like rain on new grass. He was a humble man of the people ... i.e., until he wasn't and then the sword never departed from his house. How could he be a man of peace after that?

Later, we hear the Prophet Isaiah asking for a better king, "*Oh, that YOU (Lord) would rend the heavens and come down..*" (Isa. 64.1). So, God Himself came down in the Person of Jesus Christ. He IS the King who came down like rain upon the new grass, like showers that water the earth. A softly falling reign when Jesus Christ came down.

"How far down did He come?" you ask. Well, being the infinite, eternal, unchangeable Spirit, He became a Human Baby – *the Almighty became helpless*. "Born of a woman; born under the Law..." (Gal 4) like one of the common people, He came down.

How far did He come down? When all the nation was talking about Him and He was doing miracles and signs... when it became all-but-impossible to GET to Him (Mark 2) because of the crowds and His apparent importance – He welcomed little children. I bet the stricter parents warned their kids, "Ooo, Mommy can

I go see the Man?" "You know we don't bother important people...He doesn't have time for little kids!" but He came down to them, *"like showers that water the earth"* ... a softly falling reign.

Just how far DID He come down? He asks a drink from a disreputable woman, a member of a cult with a "history" (if you know what I mean). Even His disciples were scandalized. But He told them that talking to that five-time divorcee was like food to Him. He was a humble King; He came down to that Samaritan woman at the well (John 4.34).

How far down DID He come? Once there was a man who could have been a real asset to His organization, a man with "name recognition", Jairus, pastor of a local church in Galilee (Luke 8.41ff). "Lord, we NEED this guy on our side! He'll be an INFLUENCER for our little movement!" And while Jairus was escorting (dragging?) Jesus to heal his daughter who was on her death bed, this unnamed unimportant, mousy woman stole a touch. She touched Jesus and was healed (of a chronic disease) ... AND Jesus Christ stops to applaud her faith (even as the big man, Jairus, was in emotional meltdown). No favoritism: He came down to people.

He came down to be youth pastor to a bunch of unknown young men and He loved them to the end: "He got up from supper and laid aside His garments; took a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. (John 13.4-5).

Highest of Beings, the Ground of All Being becomes a slave to a bunch of hothead, filthy-foot fishermen. He came down *"like showers that water the earth"* a softly falling reign.

But lower still... He came down so far that He took the place of a despised criminal, took a position where NO ONE wants to be found (Isaiah 53.3) – a societal pariah, a convict, an offender. He went so low that people despised Him and spat on Him (and felt justified in so doing). *"Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him, and said, 'Prophecy to us, You "Christ"; who's the one who hit You?" (Matt. 26.67-68) They spat on Him and took a reed and began to beat Him on the head. (Matt. 27.30) and they began to come up to Him and say, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and to give Him slaps in the face. (Jn. 19.3)*

Then His own blood came down and watered the earth... *Like showers that water the earth...*a slowly falling reign.

"Give the King Your judgments, O God" (and God DID!)... and under the weight of that judgment that I deserved, didn't He cry out, *"My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?"*? (*"Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ... 'MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?'"*)

"May he come down like rain upon the new grass" – How far DID He come down? Finally, He came down to the LOWEST place of all. (Eph. 4.9) *"He also descended into the lower parts of the earth..."* He went into

the earth itself. Like showers that water a parched world bereft of justice, devoid of righteousness... The dry, silent planet now houses the Humble King who came down. He sleeps... until, *"He who descended is Himself also ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things."* (Eph. 4.10)

He is reining all things to Himself (Ephesians 1.19-23). He's making all things new. His gently falling reign is even now refreshing, cleansing, soothing, dissolving, healing this tired earth. His reign is beneficial, especially to the weak and wounded, sick and sore. He gives shelter to those vulnerable to judgment. The false and forgotten; the failed and fallen; the poor in spirit, the poor, oppressed, needy and afflicted. They are (v.2) *"YOUR afflicted"* – they belong to God. *"One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, and the LORD will repay him for his good deed."* (Prov. 19.17)

His gently falling reign will not be subject to term limits. It will endure as long as the sun and the moon.

It will include all races, nations, tribes, languages and people-groups. The wild-people in the deserts, the kings of Tarshish (Spain) and the islands (for all you Islanders out there!); *"Let all kings bow down to Him, all nations serve Him..."* HE IS KING OF KINGS.

"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; lovingkindness (HESED) and truth go before You." (Psalm 89.14) (v. 12) *"He will deliver the needy when He hears their cry for help."* And maybe that's where I should come in for a landing. Point THREE: Responding to the RIGHT Reign.

"He will deliver the needy when He hears their cry for help..." So, by all means, cry to Him for help. If He is who He claimed to be, God Himself, the Mind of God who camped out among us for a short time... If He, who is God infinite, eternal and unchangeable humbled Himself and came down – YOU better not be on your High Horse when He returns to consummate His eternal reign. See your need – that YOU are RIPE for judgment and that YOU ARE THE KIND OF PERSON who needs God to come and take the judgment YOU DESERVE. Come down – He'll meet you there! He'll go to the LOWEST or HIGHEST place if you need Him and call to Him (Ps 139.8).

Only by trusting Jesus Christ will you escape the judgment that awaits the arrogant (and we are ALL more arrogant than we know) so cry out to Jesus Christ for help. He'll send His Spirit DOWN (Gal 4. 4-6) He'll start a life-long renovation project in you – He'll turn your shack into a palace and start liberating you to want to do what He calls you to do (which is always the good way).

Secondly, let's remember that GOOD GOVERNMENT is founded on righteousness AND is committed to protecting the weak and vulnerable from those who would afflict, oppress, and harm them. So, vote for that kind of person.

Third, pray for people in power. Here's St Paul writing to the young pastor, Timothy: *"I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Savior..."* (1 Tim. 2.1-3 NLT)

Last, prepare to reign WITH the King of Shalom. Long for His coming and think often of our brothers and sisters living in places where governments are NOT doing what God calls government to do – not caring for the weak, poor, vulnerable, widows, orphans, immigrants and the needy. THEY want the Jesus to come down again...

THEY want the righteous reign of shalom more than WE do... So let's identify with them more than we do... We need these weaker members of the Body of Christ to help us long for the return of Jesus Christ.

Q U O T E S

I never discuss anything else except politics and religion. There is nothing else to discuss.

— G.K. Chesterton, *The Illustrated London News* (November 5, 1927)

These prophets kept dreaming of a time when God would put things right again.

They dreamed of a new age in which human crookedness would be straightened out, rough places made plain. The foolish would be made wise, and the wise, humble. They dreamed of a time when the deserts would flower, the mountains would run with wine, weeping would cease, and people could go to sleep without weapons on their laps. People would work in peace and work to fruitful effect. Lambs could lie down with lions. All nature would be fruitful, benign, and filled with wonder upon wonder. All humans would be knit together in brotherhood and sisterhood; and all nature and all humans would look to God, walk with God, lean toward God, and delight in God. Shouts of joy and recognition would well up from valleys and seas, from women in streets and from men on ships.

The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew profits called *shalom*. We call it peace, but it means far more than peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight -- a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. **Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be.**

– Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (1995; pp. 9-10, emphasis added).