

Reflection on Psalm 122

For over a year Psalm 122 has been banging around in my head. The metrical version (Book of Praise # 84) is frequently sung at the end of the PCC's General Assembly, as it was in June 2017.

Vs. 4 of the psalm has this fascinating line – “the tribes of Yahweh (the LORD).” The psalm is a pilgrimage psalm, sung as the people of Israel from their various communities gathered to celebrate the high holy days of the Jewish calendar. People from the 12 tribes were travelling (walking) together on their way to Jerusalem, were rubbing shoulders in Jerusalem. These tribes had fought each other, had had profound disagreements – yet despite their diversity they were “the tribes of the Yahweh.” The people were held together by a commitment to fulfill the decree “to give thanks to the name of the Yahweh.” Their common worship of God eclipsed all the divisions between the tribes.

Vs. 6 of the psalm drives the same point. The call to pray for peace of Jerusalem has been understood by the Christian church to extend beyond praying for the peace of that particular city to prayers for the reign of God to fully come, that the city of God might be fully revealed. The surprise is the content of the prayer, “May they prosper who love you.” All those who love the city of God, all who look forward to the full revealing of God's reign, we pray for their prosperity. I am caught by the breadth of that prayer. For there are people who look eagerly towards the reign of God, with whom I have profound disagreement. I know they love the city of God, but (if I can be tongue in cheek for a moment) I hope we don't end up living in the same neighbourhood in the city of God. Yet I am to pray for the prosperity of those I disagree with, but who like me love the city of God.

I am driven to my knees to confess the smallness of my vision of who makes up God's people. I am driven to my knees to pray that God will prosper all those who look forward to the full revealing of God's reign. Across the tribes that make up the church, may we together fulfill the decree issued to the church, to give thanks to the name of the Triune God of grace. May we pray for the prosperity of all who love the city of God.

- Peter Bush

Psalm 122 (CEV) as a Responsive Reading in Worship

L: It made me glad to hear them say,

P: “Let's go to the house of the Lord!”

All: Jerusalem, we are standing inside your gates.

L: Jerusalem, what a strong city you are!

P: Jerusalem, what a beautiful city you are!

L: Every tribe of the Lord obeys Him

P: and comes to you, O Jerusalem, to praise His name.

All: David's royal throne is here where justice rules.

L: Jerusalem, we pray that you will have peace,

P: and that all will go well for those who love you.

L: May there be peace inside your city walls.

P: May there be peace inside in your palaces.

L: Because of our friends and our relatives

P: we will pray for peace.

All: And because of the house of the Lord our God, we will work for your good.