Psalm 77

*1. I cry aloud to God; I cry aloud to God and he will hear me.*

*2. In the day of my trouble I have sought the Lord;*

*by night my hand is stretched out and does not tire; my soul refuses comfort.*

*3. I think upon God and I groan; I ponder, and my spirit faints.*

*4. You will not let my eyelids close; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.*

*5. I consider the days of old; I remember the years long past;*

*6. I commune with my heart in the night; my spirit searches for understanding.*

*7. Will the Lord cast us off for ever? Will he no more show us his favour?*

*8. Has his loving mercy clean gone for ever?*

*Has his promise come to an end for evermore?*

*9. Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he shut up his compassion in displeasure?*

*10. And I said, ‘My grief is this:*

*that the right hand of the Most High has lost its strength.’*

*11. I will remember the works of the Lord and call to mind your wonders of old time.*

*12. I will meditate on all your works and ponder your mighty deeds.*

*13. Your way, O God, is holy; who is so great a god as our God?*

*14. You are the God who worked wonders*

*and declared your power among the peoples.*

*15. With a mighty arm you redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph.*

*16. The waters saw you, O God; the waters saw you and were afraid;*

*the depths also were troubled.*

*17. The clouds poured out water; the skies thundered;*

*your arrows flashed on every side;*

*18. The voice of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lit up the ground;*

*the earth trembled and shook.*

*19. Your way was in the sea, and your paths in the great waters,*

*but your footsteps were not known.*

*20. You led your people like sheep by the hand of Moses and Aaron.*

Refrain

I will remember the works of the Lord

and call to mind your wonders.

The first part of Psalm 77 (vv.1-10) is an individual lament, while the second part (vv.11-end) is a sort of hymn about Israel’s deliverance from Egypt.

In the first part, the psalmist is in some sort of agony and cannot sleep. The reason for his agony is that he is searching for an explanation for God’s apparent desertion of his people. God seems to have cancelled his promises and to have denied his steadfast love and gracious nature. God seems to have changed. (v.10, ‘And I said, “My grief is this: that the right hand of the Most High has lost its strength.”’)

In the second section the psalmist thinks about what it was like before God’s power changed. The deliverance from Egypt revealed the uniqueness of God, his holiness, by contrast with all other deities. (v.13, ‘Your way, O God, is holy; who is so great a god as our God?’)

The psalmist then describes the miracle of the crossing of the Red Sea. It is compared to God’s victory over the ocean of chaos at the creation, as seen in Psalm 74, ‘It was you that divided the sea by your might and shattered the heads of the dragons in the waters.’ Although God is invisible, he cuts a path through the great waters for his people.

If we are troubled by something, we often cannot sleep and toss about in bed all night. If we have something on our minds, the same thing can happen. But sometimes, during the night we find an answer, work something out, or something, which we had forgotten, suddenly comes back to us.

In Psalm 77, the psalmist is in despair in the first part, but when he remembers God’s wonders of the past (v.11, ‘I will remember the works of the Lord and call to mind your wonders of old time.’), his despair is turned into worship. (v.13, ‘Your way, O God, is holy; who is so great a god as our God?’)

In the end, he comes to realise that God, who was with his people in the Exodus event, will continue to be with and alongside them.

There are times when, faced with a problem, we wonder where God is. If someone close to us falls seriously ill, we search for an answer and feel that it is unjust. When we pray, we are not sure that we will receive an answer. So, the psalmist’s cry in v.9, ‘Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he shut up his compassion in displeasure?’ corresponds to our experience.

We may feel abandoned by God, if we can’t find a solution to our problems, as in v.7, ‘Will the Lord cast us off for ever? Will he no more show us his favour?’

However, underlying Psalm 77 is the transforming love of God, the realisation in the end that we can enter into the loving presence of God; that God, who has been revealed in every age, as for the psalmist, will be with us now and transform our doubts and despair into joy;

The coming of the Israelites out of slavery into their Promised Land will become a symbol of our passing from darkness and despair into joy and peace.

Prayer

Almighty God,

in Christ you make all things new:

transform the poverty of our nature

by the riches of your grace,

and in the renewal of our lives

make known your heavenly glory;

through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with you,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

(Collect for Epiphany 2)