

## **Meditation - Psalm 131 and Contemplative Prayer - 7<sup>th</sup> December 2021**

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,  
My eyes are not raised too high;  
I do not occupy myself with things  
Too great and marvellous for me.

But I have calmed and quieted my soul,  
like a weaned child with its mother;  
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me

O Israel, hope in the Lord  
From this time on and for evermore.

(NRSV)

I love this short Psalm! It cropped up during one of our book club sessions a few years ago and it has stayed with me ever since. In my Bible it is entitled "Song of Quiet Trust" and then "A Song of Ascents of David". It would have traditionally been sung as priests entered the temple when the Jews came to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival.

In the run up to Christmas I love looking at pictures of the baby Jesus and Mary. They are so comforting to look at and knowing that here is God who has come down to be with us on earth. A gift like no other. This is the very heart of Christmas. I suppose the images of Advent made me recollect this particular psalm.

In this Psalm, David comes humbly before God, denouncing pride, arrogance and selfish ambition and he recognises his limitations, that his intellect only goes so far. He is at peace and content in God's presence, like a weaned child who is no longer dependent on the mother's milk but who simply seeks rest and comfort from her. He gives reassurance that we must always have hope and trust in the Lord as He will be there with us for now and for all eternity. A truly inspiring and wonderful message for us today when so many people have the weight of the world on their shoulders – new variants, climate change and homelessness to mention but a few major concerns. It is indeed a song of quiet trust.

Then I read about Carl McColman, a contemplative writer, speaker and author who looks at this Psalm also as providing a set of instructions from the Bible for contemplative prayer – I had certainly never thought of it like this – but it does fit in with this sort of prayer.

The psalm starts talking about humility – of us remaining grounded in our thoughts and not letting clever ideas get in the way of us relating to God. Grand theological ideas or worries we do not have enough theology and knowledge can maybe get in the way of a freedom to pray and simply to love God in silence. He refers to the Cloud of Unknowing where it was stated “Everything you are thinking of is between you and your god. And you are further from God to the extent that anything is in your mind but God alone.”

The second verse talks about calmness and quiet, resting in God as a weaned child . Contemplation is about silence and resting in God and I believe as a child, with humility – not depending on what we know or think we know but as children, knowing the most important fact that Jesus loves us and always will. He will never desert us.

Finally he embraces hope and that in the quiet and stillness of contemplative prayer we learn to fully trust God. So all three ingredients for contemplative prayer are laid out for us in this psalm he concludes - humility, silence and hope. More to meditate on!