



Lent reflection for March 25, 2025

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Psalm 44: 13-26

*You have made us a reproach to our neighbors,
the scorn and derision of those around us.
You have made us a byword among the nations;
the peoples shake their heads at us.
I live in disgrace all day long,
and my face is covered with shame
at the taunts of those who reproach and revile me,
because of the enemy, who is bent on revenge.
All this came upon us,
though we had not forgotten you;
we had not been false to your covenant.
Our hearts had not turned back;
our feet had not strayed from your path.
But you crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals;
you covered us over with deep darkness.
If we had forgotten the name of our God
or spread out our hands to a foreign god,
would not God have discovered it,
since he knows the secrets of the heart?
Yet for your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.*

*Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep?
Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever.
Why do you hide your face
and forget our misery and oppression?
We are brought down to the dust;
our bodies cling to the ground.
Rise up and help us;
rescue us because of your unfailing love.*

Today's reflection is from Will Holshouser:

This Psalm feels like a cry of despair. Troubles abound, and words like crushed, misery, shame, disgrace, and darkness express how low the writer is feeling. There is anger at God too: why is all this being allowed to happen? Where is God? A Psalm like this, while jarring, also affirms these emotions we sometimes feel. The Psalmist is saying: that's how it is sometimes.

After each of my parents passed away, about twenty years apart, I felt a little like this. Although I was grown and had my own family, with each of those losses it felt like something fundamental in my world had been pulled away or "brought down to the dust." I picked my way through grief, fatigue, headaches, and confusion that sometimes edged into despair. It took a long time to process.

In my case, the feelings of despair were as an individual, but this Psalm also refers to the level of the group. The plural language of "we" calls to mind systems of oppression (the Psalm uses that word specifically) such as racism and sexism, which of course impact the individual level profoundly.

We may never understand why so many problems exist in the world – or if there even is a "why" to it – but this Psalm somehow rolls the recognition of those problems together with a streak of hope. Something within the Psalmist is uncrushable and hangs onto the desire to connect with God. The passage ends with an upward lift, using words like "awake!" and "rise up," taking an active role in calling out to God. The "we" language invokes the presence of community, one of the most important ways God's love reaches out to us in turn. The last two words here are "unfailing love," a statement of faith emerging from despair.



Will Holshouser has been coming to Holy Apostles for the last few months and enjoying getting to know people. He grew up in Cambridge, MA, has lived in Brooklyn since the 1990s with his wife Kathy and daughter Anna, and works as a musician and teacher.