

Go to the altar of God with exceeding joy (走到神的祭壇前，...我極大的喜樂在那裡)

Rev. Dr. Simon Lee

Dear brothers and sisters,

“By Canada Day, all (age 12 and up) will be vaccinated!” What a great news after over a year of COVID-19. Since mid-March 2020, we have been living under the dark cloud of the pandemic, seeing the daily and total death toll in staggering numbers far beyond what we have ever seen in our lifetime. We had a taste of the deep helplessness when a month ago my own daughter Sarah was tested positive for COVID, Lydia and I both must be self-quarantined from her and each other, each in our own rooms! Praise the Lord for protecting us through that period of trial.

But for me and many of us Christians, the worse thing is that we cannot “go back to Church” where we normally can cry out to God for help in prayer and get the encouragement from our fellow brothers and sisters in the community of God. Maybe we are finally seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. Finally, we have hope that we will return to worship in the house of God soon!

Recently I had the opportunity of studying Ps 42 (and 43 connected) in teaching Sunday School. As in Psalm 84 (which we looked at last time), Psalm 42 bears the name “of the Sons of Korah” as the psalmist and has the same theme of “yearning to be in the house of God.” We have seen how the author treasures the precious opportunity to be able to serve God in the sanctuary, despite the judgement of God on Korah the Levite, his father (I Chron. 9:19ff). Here we see in Psalm 42 and 43, evidence that he was in exile (43:1) which most probably was the reason why he could not go to the temple to worship God. We also see evidence of him being persecuted and scorned at by ungodly people (42:9; 43:2) to the point that he started to feel that God had abandoned him (42:9; 43:2).

Dubbed as the “China virus” by the former President of United States, anti-Asian sentiment has grown more and more over the last year in North America. We hear of horrible stories of racial discrimination and violence, against innocent people, many seniors and women, even in Vancouver and Richmond, often in broad daylight. So on top of all the fears from contracting the virus, many Asians in North America have to deal with this additional social pressure in this our adopted country, a place where we have called home for many years. Because of this, we feel even more alienated and isolated, resulting in physical and mental stress, from the physical and social distancing. While this is a far cry from what the psalmist experienced while he was in exile, some of the turmoil that the psalmist felt is being experienced by us today.

How did the psalmist go from total despair to real hope? How did he turn his lament to vow of praise? I would like to point out several important movements in the psalms that was the process by which the psalmist journeyed from desperation to exaltation.

1. Maintaining a strong thirst for God (42:1-2)

“My soul thirsts for God, the living God.” (42:2) It all starts with where our heart is. The picture is that of a deer perhaps travelling for a long time from an arid desert to the streams of water, panting and being satisfied by the cool and fresh water that he could drink. So despite his circumstances, the psalmist maintained a strong desire to be close to God whom he recognised

as “the living God.” His God is the “living” God because He is the source of life and hope, therein lies his anchor in the storm of life.

2. Maintaining an honest heart before God (42:3, 5a, 9a, 10, 11a; 43:1a)

The psalmist is not shy about lamenting before God about his feeling sad, downcast, and full of inner turmoil. Indeed we have a High Priest in Christ Jesus who understands all our pains and suffering because He himself has endured the worst of trials and temptations, and has come through victoriously (over sin and death). God knows where we are and therefore we can pour our heart of misery before Him, with no pretense, including even our desperation and disappointments with God.

3. Maintaining a wholesome remembrance of God’s grace, faithfulness and provisions in the past

The psalmist remembers the good old days of pilgrimage (42:4), the beauty and majesty of God’s creation (42:6, 7), and the protection of God night and day (8). As the songwriter reminds us, “Count your blessings, name them one by one; count your blessings and see what God has done,” so today we need to remember especially in hard times all the blessings of Gods in the past. When we cannot go back to worship in the sanctuary, let us remember how blessed we were when we were able to do so in the past. When we feel down and depressed, look at the beautiful creation of God in nature and ponder on His greatness, and know that He has never left us.

4. Maintaining a prayerful attitude before God

Despite his difficult circumstances, the psalmist never ceased to go to God in sincere prayer and earnest petition (42:9, 10; 43:1,2), recognising Him as his “salvation,” “rock” and “refuge.” He appealed to God’s promise of deliverance and God’s own name (reputation) and sovereignty (42:9, 10; 43:1,2). The more desperate we feel, the more persevering should our prayers be. The good news is God does answer prayers.

5. Maintaining a worshipful heart before God

It is remarkable to note the constant refrain of the psalmist where he reminds himself again and again to hope in God and vow to praise Him (42:5b, 11b; 43:5). Our strong desire to draw near to God leads us to a worshipful heart before Him, despite the circumstances we are in. “I shall *again* praise him” (42:5, 11; 43:5), says the psalmist. This we know, first we can worship Him anywhere, and also we will again one day be able to go and worship Him in His house, together with all our dear brothers and sisters. This is the prayer of the psalmist, and should be ours now, “Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling! Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God.” (43: 3,4) Amen!

Your servant in Christ

Pastor Simon

教牧心聲

走到神的祭壇前，…我極大的喜樂在那裡

李耀全主任牧師

親愛列宜弟兄姊妹，

“到加拿大國慶日，所有人(12歲及以上)，將均已接種疫苗！”在超過一年的 COVID-19 之後，這真是個好消息。自 2020 年 3 月中旬以來，我們一直生活在疫情大流行的陰霾之下，每天的死亡人數和死亡的總數也令人震驚，遠遠超越了我們以前所見過的人數。當我自己的女兒 Sarah 在一個月前被檢測出 COVID 呈陽性時，我們感到極為無助。師母和我必須分別隔離於自己的房間內 14 天！讚美主在那段考驗期間保護了我們。

但對我和我們中間許多基督徒而言，更困難的是，我們無法“回到教堂”去敬拜，我們無法可像在正常情況般，一同向神祈禱呼求，及在主內群體中得到鼓勵。也許我們終於能夠在隧道盡頭看到了曙光。最終，我們希望能很快重返神的殿裡去敬拜！

最近，我有機會在教主日學時研讀詩篇 42 篇(與 43 篇連貫)。就如在詩篇 84 篇中(我們上次所看的詩篇)一樣，詩篇 42 篇的標題與本詩一樣是由“可拉的後裔”所寫，其主題亦是“渴望在神的殿中”。神對詩人的父親(先祖)利未人可拉(Korah the Levite)背叛神被審判，故此我們看到作者如何珍惜能夠在聖所中侍奉神的寶貴機會(代上 9:19)。我們可從詩篇 42 和 43 篇中看到證據，證明其時他已被擄(43:1)，很可能這就是他不能去到聖殿敬拜神的原因。我們同時還看到他著受到不敬虔的人的迫害和嘲笑(42:9; 43:2)，甚至他開始感到神已離棄了他(42:9; 43:2)。

在過去的一年中，美國前總統將病毒稱之為“中國病毒”，北美地區的反亞裔情緒日增。我們聽到有關在溫哥華和列治文，發生於許多無辜的人，如長者及婦女身上，在光天化日之下受到種族歧視和暴力的可怕故事。因此，除了擔心感染病毒外，許多在北美的亞裔人士還須應對在這個我們看為自己的國家-這個我們居住了多年的地方-所帶來的額外社會壓力。因而導致我們在身體和精神上，以及在身體及社交距離所承受的壓力上，更感疏離和孤立。雖然這與詩人於被擄時的經歷相去甚遠，但今天我們也正在經歷詩人所感受到的一些心靈衝擊。

詩人如何能從完全絕望中轉變成真正的盼望？他是如何將他的哀嘆變成讚美的誓詞？我要指出的是，詩篇中的幾個重要環節是詩人從絕望走向尊崇讚美神的過程。

1. 持守對神熱切的渴慕 (42:1-2)

“神啊，我的心切慕你，如鹿切慕溪水。”(42:2) 這一切都始於我們的內心。圖畫描繪的是一隻鹿也許跋涉於乾旱的沙漠至溪水之地，一邊喘著氣，一邊滿足地享受著清涼的溪水。因此，儘管詩人的處境如此，但他仍然強烈地渴望親近被他稱為“永生神”的神。他的神是“活著的”神，因為祂是生命和盼望的源頭，祂是人生風暴中的錨。

2. 持守在神面前赤露敞開(坦誠)的心 (42:3, 5a, 9a, 10, 11a; 43:1a)

詩人不怕在神面前傾嘆自己的哀傷，沮喪和內心的沖擊。事實上，我們有一位大祭司就是基督耶穌，祂深深明白我們所有的痛苦和苦困，因為祂本身曾經歷了最艱難的考驗和試探，並且戰勝了罪惡和死亡。神能明白理解我們的困境，因此我們可以毋須掩飾地將內心痛苦傾倒在祂面前，甚至包括我們對神的絕望和失望。

3. 持守(堅持)不忘神過往一切的恩典、信實和供應

詩人記念昔日到聖殿朝聖的美好時光(42:4)，記念神創造的美麗和威嚴(42:6,7)，以及神晝夜的保護(8)。正如詩歌作者提醒我們：“主的恩典樣樣要都數，若把主的恩典從頭數一數，必能叫你驚訝主奇妙看顧。”因此，今天在困難時期中，我們需要特別記住神在過去所有的恩典和賜福。在我們仍無法回到教堂裡敬拜時，讓我們記得能在過去如此行是神所賜何等的恩福。當我們感到低沉和沮喪時，看看自然界中神美好的創造並思想祂的偉大，就會知道祂從未離開過我們。

4. 持守在神面前禱告的心

儘管詩人的處境艱難，但他始終沒有停止誠懇地和熱切地向神禱告(42:9, 10; 43:1,2)，他確認神是他的“拯救”，“磐石”和“避難所”。他抓著神的應許呼籲神的拯救，及按神自己的名(神的名聲/聲譽)和主權向神呼求(42:9, 10; 43:1,2)。我們越是感到絕望，我們的祈禱就越應堅定。好消息就是：神確實回應我們的禱告。

5. 持守在神面前敬拜的心

值得注意的是，詩篇作者不斷地督促自己，他再三地提醒自己要對神存著盼望，並且立誓要讚美祂(42:5b, 11b; 43:5)。儘管我們也處於相同的情況下，我們親近神的熱切渴慕，能使我們在神面前充滿敬拜讚美的心。我們知道，最要緊的是我們可在任何地方敬拜祂，也知道終有一天我們能夠與所有親愛的弟兄姊妹一起在神的居所中敬拜祂。這是詩人的祈禱，現在也應該成為我們的祈禱。“求你發出你的亮光和真理，好引導我，帶我到你的聖山，你的居所。我就走到神的祭壇前，到神、我極帶的喜樂那裡。神啊！我的神啊！我要彈琴稱讚你。”(43:3,4)

阿們！

主僕，

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