

10th March 2022

*Why stand so far off Lord?
Ut quid Domine*

Dear Friends,

I do not know what to say. I am writing to meet a deadline for a letter that will not appear and be read until the first days of April, thirty-five days after Russia began making war on Ukraine, and it is impossible to know what the state of the world will be by then. Projections range from better to worse and include the worst. Let me then begin with some words from Psalm 10.

Why stand so far off Lord? Why hide yourself in time of trouble?
The wicked in their pride persecute the poor; let them be caught in the schemes they have devised.
The wicked boast of their heart's desire; the covetous curse and revile the Lord.
The wicked in their arrogance say God will not avenge it; God is not in their thoughts.

Arise O Lord God and lift up your hand; forget not the humble
Surely you behold trouble and misery; you see it and take it into your own hand
The helpless commit themselves to you; for you are the helper of the orphan
Break the power of the wicked and malicious; search out their wickedness until you find none

Lord you will hear the desire of the poor; you will incline your ear to the fulness of their heart
To give justice to the orphan and the oppressed so that people are no longer driven in terror
from the land.

Now firstly the Psalms are ancient, dating in the case of the very earliest to before the Jewish people were taken and placed in exile in Babylon. These poems have been used ever since as a way of praising God but also for lamenting and coping with despair. Notice this one begins with a prayer, the poet is talking with God and is **COMPLAINING**. They question God, they are angry with God - where are you? The writer not only complains but craves justice against the intolerable wickedness of the oppressor and invader. He describes the wicked as "Godless" - "God is not in their thoughts."

So, millennia ago people were asking the question we are asking "Where is God in all this?"
Do not then fear to ask it.

Notice that the Psalmist does not stop there but goes on to pray for God's action : "Arise Lord and lift up your hand", there is no timidity. God come and put this right. "Break the power of the wicked and malicious."
Do not then fear to ask for powerful intervention.

The poet does all this confidently "Lord you will hear so that the people are no longer driven in terror from the land."
Do not then fear to believe.

This Psalm might have been written last week for its pertinence - but rather than despair let us follow its precepts and remember the deep conviction of the writer that God is good and will not desert us.

