

Psalm 80

1. *Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, you that led Joseph like a flock;*
2. *Shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim,
before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.*
3. *Stir up your mighty strength and come to our salvation.*
4. **Turn us again, O God;
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.**
5. *O Lord God of hosts,
how long will you be angry at your people's prayer?*
6. *You feed them with the bread of tears;
you give them abundance of tears to drink.*
7. *You have made us the derision of our neighbours,
and our enemies laugh us to scorn.*
8. **Turn us again, O God of hosts;
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.**
9. *You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.*
10. *You made room around it, and when it had taken root, it filled the land.*
11. *The hills were covered with its shadow
and the cedars of God by its boughs.*
12. *It stretched out its branches to the Sea and its tendrils to the River.*
13. *Why then have you broken down its wall,
so that all who pass by pluck off its grapes?*
14. *The wild boar out of the wood tears it off,
and all the insects of the field devour it.*
15. *Turn again, O God of hosts, look down from heaven and behold;*
16. *Cherish this vine which your right hand has planted,
and the branch that you made so strong for yourself.*
17. *Let those who burnt it with fire, who cut it down,
perish at the rebuke of your countenance.*
18. *Let your hand be upon the man at your right hand,
the son of man you made so strong for yourself.*

19. *And so will we not go back from you;
give us life, and we shall call upon your name.*

20. ***Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts;
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.***

Refrain

Show the light of your countenance, O Lord God of hosts,
and we shall be saved.

Psalms 80 is a community lament in four sections with a congregational refrain: 'Turn us again, O God; show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.' (in bold)

The first two sections, vv.1-8, contain the metaphors of Shepherd and King. The shepherd is angry at the flock and feeds it on tears. (v.6, 'You feed them with the bread of tears; you give them abundance of tears to drink.')

The nation is sad because of a military defeat, and God seems to the people to be destroying his own creation. Benjamin and Joseph (vv.1 and 2) were the children of Jacob's favoured wife, Rachel, and Ephraim and Manasseh (v.2) were Joseph's sons. Benjamin, Ephraim and Manasseh were the principal tribes of the Northern kingdom.

The third and fourth sections, vv.9-end, describe God's mighty acts in history. Here Israel is described as the vine. In verse 9, the vine describes Israel's being brought out of Egypt at the Exodus, and then the conquest of Canaan. (v.9, 'You drove out the nations and planted it.')

It goes on to refer to the empire of David and Solomon from the River Euphrates to the Mediterranean. (v.12, 'It stretched out its branches to the Sea and its tendrils to the River.')

Now the walls of God's protecting presence are broken down, and enemies strip the vine of its fruit. (v.13, 'Why then have you broken down its wall, so that all who pass by pluck off its grapes?')

So, the psalmist (vv.15-end) prays for restoration, the return of God's saving presence and also the coming of God's power to the king, 'the man at your right hand' (v.18), a picture found also in Psalm 110: 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."'

The psalm ends with a prayer for the restoration of a united Israel under the king in Jerusalem.

The image of the vine is an important one, which expresses the relationship between God and his people. It can be found in the servant song in Isaiah 5, which may be a love song, and which is reminiscent of the poetry of the Song of Solomon. The vineyard has been carefully looked after, showing the care, which God gives to his people. But, in spite of this, the vineyard has produced wild grapes. The people, whom the vineyard represents, have strayed away and have become unfaithful. God, the vine-grower, has fulfilled his part, but the people's response has been not justice, but bloodshed, not righteousness, but a cry. So, the vineyard will be destroyed, a symbol of the broken relationship between God and his people. In Psalm 80, there is a similar picture: 'Why then have you broken down its

wall, so that all who pass by pluck off its grapes?' The psalmist cries out for restoration: 'Cherish this vine which your right hand has planted.'

In John's Gospel, Jesus describes himself as the vine, his Father as the vine-grower and his disciples as the branches. This also expresses the close relationship between Jesus and his disciples.

We also face problems during our lives, illness of someone close to us, bereavement, when all seems dark, problems, which we find difficulty in solving. Sometimes, we stray away, at times we wonder where God is. In times of war or in the present corona virus crisis, we cry out for restoration, for a return to how life was before all this happened. We believe that we depend on the vine, that whatever happens, God will always be there, ever-living and ever-loving, wanting to bring us back, the God, who will never leave us. So, we can sing the refrain with joy: 'Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts; show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.'

Prayer

Lord God, whose Son is the true vine and the source of life,
ever giving himself that the world may live:
may we so receive within ourselves
the power of his death and passion
that, in his saving cup,
we may share his glory and be made perfect in his love;
for he is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

Amen.

(Post Communion Collect, Trinity 7)