

5th January 2020

Disquieted

**“Why art thou so full of heaviness, O my soul:
and why art thou so disquieted within me.”**

The Book of Common Prayer, Psalm 42:6

One of the great set-piece occasions of the Church of Scotland is its annual General Assembly, when 800 ministers and elders gather to deliberate on Church business. Integral to the Assembly is its daily worship, which always includes the singing of a Metrical Psalm, usually unaccompanied, echoing centuries of Presbyterian worship. Powerful words, strong tunes, sung with full-on commitment ... the hairs on the back of my neck stand up when Psalms are sung like that.

Such an occasion has been the singing of Psalm 42, from the metrical version of the 1929 Scottish Psalter, to the wonderfully evocative tune *Invocation* by Robert Archibald Smith. It reduced me to tears ...

*Why art thou then cast down my soul? What should discourage thee?
And why with vexing thoughts are thou disquieted in me?
Still trust in God; for him to praise good cause I yet shall have;
he of my countenance is the health, my God, my God,
my God that doth me save, that doth me save.*

In the light of our Government's announcement yesterday of a further lockdown, and the news that all churches will be closed for the rest of January, I am cast down and disquieted with the Psalmist. It's not directed at God. It's just "in me", part of who I am right at this moment.

So why sing such words in worship? Why give such credence to down-beat thoughts? Why am I close to tears as I write this? Because, if we can't express our disquiet, we are less than human. If we deny our heavy-heartedness, we hide ourselves from our God. If we do not give ourselves to lamentation, how can we truly give ourselves to praise?

The hairs on my neck stand up not just because of the power of the singing, but because the honesty of the Psalmist gives me a voice. In the depth of my disquiet, and in the mystery of faith that I don't really understand, I know again the saving closeness of my God.

A prayer for today

I trust what I still do not see. I have faith in what I do not yet understand.

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