

**33B* THE TIMELESS PSALMS:
A CALL TO WORSHIP
EASTER 3B 2018
PSALM 4**

Listening God: we gather together as we lament over our shared despair.

We gather together to pray: “Lead me to hope... oh, lead me to hope I pray...” [1]

Responding God: we come to you when we are numb with fear and despair.

In our trusting need we pray: “Lead me to faith...oh, lead me to faith I pray...” [1]

Reacting God: we celebrate that through your generosity and love, you have offered us all “*unrivaled joy*,” [2] and God has indeed blessed our trust and hope.

In joy-filled celebrations, we gather together to praise and thank our God for the merciful blessings we have received from God, who heard our cries for help. Amen.

PSALM 4

For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be accompanied by stringed instruments.

1 Answer me when I call to you, O God who declares me innocent.
Free me from my troubles. Have mercy on me and hear my prayer.

2 How long will you people ruin my reputation?
How long will you make groundless accusations?
How long will you continue your lies? *Interlude*

3 You can be sure of this: The LORD set apart the godly for himself.
The LORD will answer when I call to him.

4 Don't sin by letting anger control you.
Think about it overnight and remain silent. *Interlude*

5 Offer sacrifices in the right spirit, and trust the LORD.

6 Many people say, “Who will show us better times?”
Let your face smile on us, LORD.

7 You have given me greater joy
than those who have abundant harvests of grain and new wine.

8 In peace I will lie down and sleep,
for you alone, O LORD, will keep me safe.

**PRAYERS OF LAMENT & PETITION:
EASTER 3B 2018
PSALM 4**

Listening God: we gather together as we lament over our shared despair; and so we gather together to pray: *"Lead me to hope... oh, lead me to hope, I pray..."* [1]
We come to you with our hearts stripped bare with numbness; with our regrets, and with a level of disillusionment with life; and with the world in which we live. We have struggled to serve you and our neighbour – as we are instructed – but we now are no nearer to finding the answers to our problems and fears. Give us hope for a better future, we pray; so that we can keep going with your work, and finding some purpose for the work we believe you call us to fulfil in your name. So, lead us to a deeper hope that you promised to us, through your Holy Presence with us; every step of our days.

Responding God: we come to you because our fears have grown out of proportion to our situation. We can't seem to see beyond those fears that block out the warmth of your smile upon us; and we stumble through the bleakness of our sense of lost vision and perspective. We know that you hear our prayers and respond in love to our cries— but please, Holy God, *"...free us from our troubles. Have mercy on us and hear our prayer..."* Though your gracious love, wipe away the weight of our troubles so that once again we may be your faithful community of faith; *"...lead me to faith, I pray..."* [1]

Reacting God: we celebrate that through your generosity and love, you have offered us all *"unrivalled joy,"* [2] and God has indeed blessed us with hope and faith. We dare to call your Holy Presence with us a 'reaction' on your part - to our needs and our prayers. And so, O God, we individually and collectively pray, that you will *"...Lead me to love, oh, lead me to love..."* so that we will know your peace that stifles fears; that takes the heat out of our despair; and warms up our numb hearts and minds. In joyous celebrations, we gather together to praise and thank our God for the gracious blessings we all have received from God, who heard our cries for help; and who brought us faith and love to share. Amen.

**A PERSONAL MEDITATION:
EASTER 3B 2018
PSALM 4**

Compare the first two verses of Psalm 4 (see above) with the Voice translation: *“Answer my prayers, O True God, the righteous, who makes me right. I was hopelessly surrounded, and you rescued me. Once again hear me; hide me in your favour; bring victory in defeat and hope in hopelessness...”* [2] As usual, Professor Walter Brueggemann adds wisdom to these words: *“...These prayers of complaint are, in the final analysis, acts of hope. They believe and assume that the present circumstances of trouble will not endure. These speakers expect God to change such circumstances and believe that they are entitled to such change... By the end of the psalm, we are assured that God has heard, and God has acted, and well-being has been restored... While we should be glad for the lingering residue of Israel’s laments, we should, even more than that, be grateful for these scripts and models of prayer that stake everything on full covenantal honesty in the presence of God. Such daring honestly, at God’s throne of mercy, is the only route to transformative well-being...”* [3] This lament is indeed a cry of hope as the psalmist sang: *“...You can be sure of this: The LORD set apart the godly for himself. The LORD will answer when I call to him... trust the LORD...”*

Creative pause: Do you ever pray: *“Bring hope in my hopelessness?”*

I grew up living very close to a large railway station that serviced large areas of my state, and during the wheat harvesting season, we frequently had very long trains filled with wheat, making their slow way to the silos on the coast for overseas transportation. There was a very steep hill just past the station, and during the night, I used to listen to the trains labouring up that hill, as they never had sufficient speed up to manage that climb with ease. As I listened to the train engines struggling, I used to recite that old poem: *“The little engine that could”* written by Watty Piper: *“I think I can, I think I can, I think I can ...”*, until eventually the majority of the train was over that hill; then I would say: *“I knew I could, I knew I could..”* as it thundered off into the distance. To me, I learned early in my life, that concept was the true reality of hope.

Creative pause: How strong is your sense of hope in God’s goodness?

In response to that hope in God, the psalmist sang with glee: *“Let your brilliant face shine upon us, O Eternal One, that we may know the undeniable answer. You have filled me with joy, and happiness has risen in my heart, great delight and unrivalled joy, even more than when bread abounds and wine flows freely. Tonight, I will sleep securely on a bed of peace because I trust you, you alone, O Eternal One, will keep me safe.”* [2] *“Unrivalled joy”* as it was expressed, was of a joy like no other ever known to the psalmist; and when it was added to *“great delight”* – arising from a sense of frustration and disappointment - we can understand something of the overwhelming pleasure God’s response created deep within the psalmist!

Creative pause: *“Lead me to hope, oh lead me to hope, lead me to hope I pray...”* [1]

[1] “Uniting in Song” 9.14
“Lead me to hope, oh lead me to hope”
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[2] Psalm 4: 1, 6b-8
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[3] Text by Professor Walter
Brueggemann
from *“From whom no secrets are hid”*
Chapter 8, pages 91-93
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*Revised Indexing Scheme from 'Consultation on Church Union' (COCU).

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