

Psalm 120 "A First Step Forward in a Liminal Season"

1. We are in a liminal season. We are neither here nor there, it is not what was nor what will be. In such liminal seasons God often does his greatest work - consider the Israelites in the Sinai desert. What about liminal seasons makes them fertile ground for God's work in us?

This first psalm expresses deep dissatisfaction with the way the world works, and when the world is "working" it is hard to see that. A fish knows nothing else but what it is like to be in the water. In a liminal season we are removed from "what was" and are able to more easily see what is wrong with the world.

In a liminal season the things we look to to provide a solid foundation are not there or are shaky and crumbling which leads us to look elsewhere for something solid to secure ourselves to. This opens us up to receive from God what He longs to give us.

In a liminal season it is hard to see what the future will hold, leaving us open to behold God's future.

The Jews reoriented themselves to God's work in that liminal season with three pilgrimage feasts to Jerusalem. During that journey the pilgrims returned again and again to the psalms of ascent to guide them in being formed as God's people in God's world. Every journey needs a starting point, a first step toward our destination, and Psalm 120 provides that for us...

Read Psalm 120

2. The psalmist expresses deep dissatisfaction with the patterns of the world. What aspects of your own world do you find distressing or unsatisfying?

This is simply a personal reflection question that needs to yes be given adequate time, but if you let it could take up your entire time. Allow the question to linger until you have heard from the majority of your group and you have wide ranging answers.

3. To where, to what, to whom do we look for help in the midst of these distressing patterns of our world?

We look to leaders, science, human ingenuity, power etc.

*The following quote from Eugene Peterson in – **A long obedience in the same direction** - may help your conversation.*

"As long as we think the next election might eliminate crime and establish justice or another scientific breakthrough might save the environment or another pay raise might push us over the edge of anxiety into a life of tranquility, we are not likely to risk the arduous uncertainties of the life of faith."

4. To whom, to what does the Psalmist look to for help? What means of transformation does the Psalmist rely upon?

To God – Deliver me O Lord.

By means of repentance. The psalmist is asking God to bring the perpetrators of injustice to suffer the natural consequences of their weaponized words – warriors arrows.

Toward what end? Not punishment but repentance for burning coals pointed to an ancient Egyptian practice of placing coals on one's head as a sign of penitence.

5. Turning from the patterns of the world to adopt the patterns of the kingdom in repentance is the posture the Psalmist invites us to. Such a posture in the world leads the psalmist to feel like a stranger in a strange land that brings about conflict with others. How does the adoption of such a posture lead to this feeling, this experience?

Not participating in the patterns of the world seems to communicate an implicit judgement of those who continue such patterns. Though none may exist the desire of darkness is to always rid themselves of the exposing nature of light.

When continuing the patterns of the world there is the affirmation and acclamation of those around us. For the pursuit of the gods of this world – fame, money, power, sex – is celebrated. The patterns of the kingdom are not similarly affirmed and celebrated – which without the support of a Christian community can be a very lonely life indeed.