

Psalm Twenty-Eight

To you, O LORD, I call;
my rock, do not refuse to hear me,
for if you are silent to me,
I shall be like those who go down to the Pit.
Hear the voice of my supplication,
as I cry to you for help,
as I lift up my hands
toward your most holy sanctuary.

Do not drag me away with the wicked,
with those who are workers of evil,
who speak peace with their neighbors,
while mischief is in their hearts.
Repay them according to their work,
and according to the evil of their deeds;
repay them according to the work of their hands;
render them their due reward.
Because they do not regard the works of the LORD,
or the work of his hands,
he will break them down and build them up no more.

Blessed be the LORD,
for he has heard the sound of my pleadings.
The LORD is my strength and my shield;
in him my heart trusts;
so I am helped, and my heart exults,
and with my song I give thanks to him.

The LORD is the strength of his people;
he is the saving refuge of his anointed.
O save your people, and bless your heritage;
be their shepherd, and carry them forever.

When it comes to communication, I am someone who tries to respond promptly, whenever I feel a response is required. Unread and un-replied-to emails irritate me. If I have voicemail, I am going to check it, and try to get back to the caller within the same day. Text messages are returned in haste.

It took me a while to realize that not everyone communicates this way. Some people will pick up on the first ring, but only open their inbox once a week. Others thumb a message back right away, but only talk on the phone when it comes to calling their elderly grandmother, or ordering food. There are those who let all incoming correspondence sit for a while first. And some people just have busy lives, or other things to do that day (imagine that!).

A lot of people share my struggle. We live in a world of near-instant delivery and counter-delivery. We have the technology and the ability to talk back-and-forth in real time – no matter how great the distance between us - and so a lot of us come to expect a more or less immediate response. We might even begin to spiral, if we don't receive one. *Did I say something wrong? Are they upset at me? Did I get their number wrong, or misspell their address? Did something happen to them? Are they OK?*

Nearly all of the time, it is fine. I didn't say something wrong. They are not upset at me. The message was delivered to the right place. Nothing happened. They are OK. They eventually reply, and all is as well in the world again. But the silence in-between can be difficult. Especially if you are the sensitive and attentive sort. There is the sense that they "could get back to you immediately, if they wanted to – and the anxiety that follows when they don't."*

I believe that the writer of Psalm Twenty-Nine experienced something like that, leading up to this prayer. God, in their view, is One who *could respond immediately*, but for whatever reason *does not*. We see them begin to spiral. The author's message is much more urgent than most of mine, most days (vv. 3-5) and so their anxiety is all the greater for it, when nothing is heard, in return (vv. 1-2).

As in my experience, there is, of course, relief in the end. God has received the message, yes, and God finally responds (v. 6). "I am helped" they write. "My heart exults, and I give thanks" (v. 7).

But the silence in-between can be difficult. Especially, again, if you are the sensitive and attentive sort. Like the psalm-writer, we "may know, rationally, that there are plenty of good reasons for someone not to respond," or respond later, and yet "it doesn't always feel that way."*

We may know, rationally, that, within the infinite mystery of who God is and how God works in the world, there are plenty of good reasons for God not to respond, or respond at a later time. We are taught that as children in Sunday School, and tell that to one another as a means of assurance, in times of crisis. And yet, it doesn't always feel that way. We can't see what's on the other side. We get impatient. We question. We obsess. We assume the silence must be a signal of malevolence, and become convinced God must be upset at us.

It is a common experience, this perceived delay on the part of the Divine. It is part of the reason why we so often find the psalmists asking, *How long? How long until You answer me? Why won't You return my call, God?* Psalm Twenty-Eight is a prayer for that time in-between. It is also, I believe, an invitation into a kind of trust, in the midst of it – a trust that somewhere behind the silence is a God who nonetheless hears, and who carries us, extending strength, blessing and salvation (vv. 8-9).

* <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/01/ignoring-each-other-in-the-age-of-instant-communication/550325/>