

Psalm 108

1 A song. A psalm of David.
2 My heart is firm, O God;
I will sing and chant a hymn with all my soul.
3 Awake, O harp and lyre!
I will wake the dawn.
4 I will praise You among the peoples, O LORD,
sing a hymn to You among the nations;
5 for Your faithfulness is higher than the heavens;
Your steadfastness reaches to the sky.
6 Exalt Yourself over the heavens, O God;
let Your glory be over all the earth!
7 That those whom You love may be rescued,
deliver with Your right hand and answer me.
8 God promised in His sanctuary
that I would exultingly divide up Shechem,
and measure the Valley of Sukkoth;
9 Gilead and Manasseh would be mine,
Ephraim my chief stronghold,
Judah my scepter;
10 Moab would be my washbasin;
on Edom I would cast my shoe;
I would raise a shout over Philistia.
11 Would that I were brought to the bastion!
Would that I were led to Edom!
12 But You have rejected us, O God;
God, You do not march with our armies.
13 Grant us Your aid against the foe,
for the help of man is worthless.
14 With God we shall triumph;
He will trample our foes.

Have you ever felt so good about something, so joyful that you had to scream out loud? I hope so. The opening section of Psalm 108 reflects that kind of joy, from which the speaker feels he will “wake the dawn!” What a glorious image! This reminds me of what has become a common occurrence in some cities around the world during this period of quarantine: singers and other musicians giving impromptu performances from the balconies of their apartment buildings.

So often we give voice to our feelings of anger and sadness but we bottle up our joy. And in this time of great trouble, sadness, and shortage, we may feel guilty about showing signs of happiness. The sense of guilt is not ridiculous, because so many claims of joy and achievement include someone else who is in worse shape. In this psalm, the only way - it seems - to measure our status is in comparison to those others, like Edom, Moab, and Philistia. In other words, we have to put someone else down in order to feel better about ourselves. We know, however, that this is not true, but the feeling of guilt is still strong.

Do not feel guilty. Do not sell short the human capacity for empathy: we can feel bad with those who are suffering and feel good with those who have something to celebrate at the same time. Even people who are suffering are usually able also to share in someone else’s gladness.

So find something to be excited about. Find someone to be excited about. When you are really excited, give a scream that could wake the dawn! But just maybe wait until after the people in your house are already awake.