

Psalm 41

7th Sunday, Year B
Evening Prayer Friday Week 1

This is the final psalm in Book I of the Psalms (see verse 13). It is a prayer of trust from someone who is ill. After speaking of the happiness experienced by those who care for the needy, he acknowledges that he has sinned, but also that he has cared for the weak. He calls upon God to forgive him and to care now for him. His main concern seems to be that he does not want his enemies to see in his illness a vindication of their position. However, even his friends are hostile, possibly because of fear of contagion. They assume he has offended God and so are afraid that his illness is putting them in danger too. The title reads: 'To the leader. A Psalm* of David'.

¹Happy* are those who care for the poor*; YHWH* will rescue them in the day of trouble.

²YHWH will protect them and preserve their life, and they will be happy* in the land. He will not give them up to the will of their enemies.

³YHWH will sustain them on their sick bed; he will restore them from sickness to health.

⁴As for me, I said, 'YHWH, be gracious* to me; heal me*', for I have sinned* against you.'

⁵My enemies wish evil upon me: 'When will he die? When will his name perish?'

⁶When they come to see me, they pretend to be friendly but their hearts* are planning mischief. When they leave, they spread it abroad.

⁷All who hate me gang up against me; they plot evil against me.

⁸This is what they are thinking and saying: 'He has contracted an incurable sickness. He is confined to bed and will never rise from it.'

The psalm begins with an act of faith. Compare:

Whoever is kind to the poor lends to YHWH, and will be repaid in full.

– Proverbs 19:17

The psalmist acknowledges his sin. 'Me' in verse four translates the Hebrew *nepeš*. See the article 'Being' in the Introduction. He wants the healing to penetrate to the core of his being. Compare the following:

My child, when you are ill, do not delay, but pray to the Lord, and he will heal you. Give up your faults and direct your hands rightly, and cleanse your heart from all sin.

– Sirach 38:9-10

Others are rejecting him because of his sickness.

The profound pain in this verse is echoed in the New Testament when Jesus is betrayed by one of the Twelve:

The one who shared my bread is the first to turn his back on me ('show me his heel').

– John 13:18 (see Mark 14:18)

The psalmist prays to be vindicated. He is delighted that his prayer is answered. He is restored to health and is able to go to the temple to praise and thank YHWH.

This verse does not belong to Psalm 41. It marks the conclusion to Book I of the psalms.

⁹Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who shared my bread, is the first to turn his back on me ('show me his heel').

¹⁰But you, YHWH, be gracious* to me, and raise me up, that I may give them what they deserve.

¹¹By this I know that you are pleased with me: my enemy has not triumphed over me.

¹²You have restored my health and you will keep me in your presence forever.

¹³Blessed* be YHWH, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen.