



Psalm 41 – When the World Is Against You

The psalmist sounds almost paranoid. He is ill unto death, and one wonders if his words are formed more from his delirium than reality. *My enemies wonder in malice when I will die, and my name perish. And when they come to see me, they utter empty words, while their hearts gather mischief; when they go out, they tell it abroad. All who hate me whisper together about me; they imagine the worst for me.* He feels utterly alone in his sufferings. There is no one to comfort and those whom he would have counted on have turned against him. *They think that a deadly thing has fastened on me, that I will not rise again from where I lie. Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me.* In their estimation, he is as good as dead. Each morning they scan the obituaries expecting, even hoping to find notice of his death. At least that's the way he sees it.

By contrast: *Happy are those who consider the poor; the LORD delivers them in the day of trouble. The LORD protects them and keeps them alive; they are called happy in the land. You do not give them up to the will of their enemies. The LORD sustains them on their sickbed; in their illness you heal all their infirmities.* So he says of himself. He knows that he will come through whatever it is that assails him because the Lord will deliver him.

There aren't too many of us who can identify with this poet's experience, though I have known those in my pastoral ministry who have been forgotten by their loved ones in their later years, and, unfortunately, those, too, whose mental decline has left them with a skewed view of reality. Most of us, though, are blessed with family and friends who share our ups and downs, who are there with us and for us. The psalm does say something to all of us, though, about how we relate to those in the circle of our lives who are suffering physically, emotionally, or mentally. First, be careful with your words. Words of comfort and encouragement, and news from the world beyond the hospital room or nursing home are always welcome. Keep your visits brief, but most of all offer a listening presence. If the suffering one chooses you to be the one to hear what is deep within her, consider it a privilege and listen compassionately. Second, don't assume the worse. Body language sometimes, even more than words, communicates our estimation of another's condition. Most of all, though, remember in your own times of struggle and in the times when those you love struggle: there is hope, strength, and healing with the Lord who *sustains them on their sickbed; [and] in their illness heals all their infirmities.*