

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

28 February



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Psalm 63: 1-9

A Psalm of David, when he was in the Wilderness of Judah.

O God, you are my God, I seek you,
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.
Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.
So I will bless you as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.

My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips
when I think of you on my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.
My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.

But those who seek to destroy my life
shall go down into the depths of the earth;

REFLECT

This wilderness psalm is attributed to David, that man after God's own heart, who spent years as a desert vigilante trying to avoid being killed by King Saul.

It compares the fierce longing for water in a barren land to the feeling of yearning for an absent God.

Over and over in the scriptures God promises to provide food and water in the wilderness. And yet right now, they are absent.

Over and over in the scriptures God promises never to leave us. And yet right now, God is nowhere to be found.

How can this be understood? Has God stopped loving us? Or perhaps God is nice but ineffective? Or, most likely, God never existed in the first place.

The Psalmist's cry from the heart is echoed when Jesus calls out on the cross 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me'.

It seems that thirsting for an absent God is something God's finest followers do.

It seems that thirsting for an absent God is a form of faith.

Simone Weil puts it (with her characteristic use of the male pronoun) *he who has not God in himself cannot feel his absence*.¹

Longing for a seemingly absent God is an ancient and powerful form of prayer.

SAYINGS

A giant thirst is a great joy when quenched in time.

Edward Abbey
Desert Solitaire

Thirst

Another morning and I wake with thirst
for the goodness I do not have. I walk
out to the pond and all the way God has

¹ Gravity and Grace

given us such beautiful lessons. Oh Lord,
I was never a quick scholar but sulked
and hunched over my books past the hour
and the bell; grant me, in your mercy,
a little more time. Love for the earth
and love for you are having such a long
conversation in my heart. Who knows what
will finally happen or where I will be sent,
yet already I have given a great many things
away, expecting to be told to pack nothing,
except the prayers which, with this thirst,
I am slowly learning.

Mary Oliver

To come to the pleasure which you have not
you must go by a way in which you enjoy not.
To come to the knowledge which you have not
you must go by a way in which you know not.
To come to the possession you have not
you must go by a way in which you possess not.
To come to be what you are not
you must go by a way in which you are not.

St John of the Cross
The Ascent of Mount Carmel

[Psalm 63](#)

Sons of Korah

PRAY

The unknown fourteenth century author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* beautifully describes longing as a form of prayer:

*Reconcile yourself to wait in this darkness as long as is necessary, but still go on
longing after [God] who you love.*

*Strike that thick cloud of unknowing with the sharp dart of longing love, and on no
account whatever think of giving up.*

Today spend some time with whatever it is you truly long for.

Feel the longing, and direct it to God, no matter whether you feel God's presence or not.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Have you ever felt a sense of the absence of God? Do you now?

What do you think is going on when someone feels the absence of God?