

We don't always get insight into what was going on with the psalmist or any Biblical writer for that matter, but we do for this psalm. The headline gives us a hint to the backstory as to why David is so angry. The headline says, "A psalm of David, regarding the time Doeg the Edomite said to Saul, 'David has gone to see Ahimelech.'" Let's start there with the backstory, which is found in 1 Samuel 21 and 22.

First of all, let us remember the family relations. David and Jonathon are best friends. Jonathan and his father, King Saul, grew to love and admire David so much that Saul gives David his daughter to marry. So, David is Saul's son-in-law. Then, Saul and David had a falling out. Saul becomes so jealous of David because he is a mighty warrior and people are drawn to him, just like he was. Saul is aging and feels threatened that he will lose his throne to David. So, he wants to have David killed.

David is warned, so he flees for his life. He goes to the town of Nob where a lot of priests live. One priest, Ahimelech gives David bread and a sword, which happens to be the same sword that David used to kill Goliath. Small problem: One of Saul's trusted servants (Doeg) happens to be there and sees Ahimelech helping David. He goes back and tells Saul, which is what the headline says.

Saul is outraged. He sees this as treason and orders to have Ahimelech and the whole town of Nob to be killed. Doeg not only tells Saul where David is, but he is the one who wiped out the whole town. 1 Samuel 22 says eighty-five priests plus women, children, infants, and even animals were put to the sword. That's a pretty

gruesome backstory, but it does explain David's anger in this psalm.

David begins the psalm by standing up to his enemy:

"Why do you boast, O mighty one,
of mischief done against the godly?
All day long you are plotting destruction.
Your tongue is like a sharp razor,
you worker of treachery.
You love evil more than good,
and lying more than speaking the truth.
You love all words that devour,
O deceitful tongue.
But God will break you down forever;
he will snatch and tear you from your
tent; he will uproot you from the land of the
living.
The righteous will see, and fear,
and will laugh at the evildoer,
saying, "See the one who would not take
refuge in God,
but trusted in abundant riches,
and sought refuge in wealth!"(v.1-7).

David is heartbroken and probably guilt-stricken that he put Ahimelech and the whole town in danger. Yet, he doesn't shy away from this injustice. He stands up to the one responsible. One could interpret that he is addressing Doeg since he was the one who committed the murderous acts. But, perhaps he's addressing Saul. Saul was the one who ordered these acts. Doeg was just following orders. He knew it would be his head if he didn't do it or confess that he had seen David. So many times, we think our enemy is the one we see committing hurtful

acts against us, yet usually there is a bigger enemy in the shadows that we need to face.

Imagine someone in your life that fits this description: Someone who boasts about their crimes, who plots destruction, who loves evil more than good and who lies more than tells the truth. Someone who loves to destroy people with their words, who doesn't put their trust in God but instead puts their trust in themselves.

Sometimes our enemy is not a person, but a problem, an emotion, a circumstance. Saul's enemy was fear and jealousy. He was afraid that he'd lose his power and wealth. So much so, that he turned his back on God and sought to remove and hurt those closest to him. If Saul was able to face his enemy like David, things could've turned out differently.

It may seem impossible to stand up to people or problems like this. It is intimidating to face our enemies and their injustice. It's also really difficult not to get pulled into their evil schemes while we're standing up to injustice. We may want to beat them at their own game or make them pay for what they've done to us, but this is the most important lesson we can learn from David in this psalm. No matter how angry he is for this atrocity, David doesn't take matters into his own hands. He leaves the judgment to God.

David believed in a God that would strike people down for evil deeds. During Biblical times, people thought God punished people by sending famine, floods, locusts, barrenness, leprosy. People did not have the knowledge of weather systems or medical problems, so if they couldn't explain it, they

determined it had to be God. God is mysterious and there are many things we still cannot explain, but we have a different perspective today about God's punishment. Even so, there are things that we should let God take care of. Like David, we should leave the judgment to God. We do believe that God's justice will prevail, just like David did.

That is so hard to do when we're so angry and we've lost so much. But, in order to move on, unscathed, we take our cue from David and focus on ourselves and our actions. We don't take revenge on our enemy. We keep ourselves deeply rooted in God's love. That will keep us from letting our anger and hurt pull us into judging others and retribution we may regret later.

David takes a breath. He pauses. He determines he will remain with God: "I am like a green olive tree, thriving in the house of God" (v.8). We may think that an olive tree is not a very majestic tree, but it is one that is hardy. They "have been known to survive years of neglect and drought. Their root shoots provide regeneration."¹ Being deeply rooted in God's love keeps David alive and helps him to survive this difficult time.

As we close, let us take a moment to do a reflection as we Respond to the Word. Open your bulletins to the Questions for Reflection and Call to Action.

1. Who or What is the enemy that you face or need to face?
2. How can you remain deeply rooted in God's love while you face this enemy?
3. I commit to _____.

¹ Linda McKiernan-Allen, *Feasting on the Word*, Kindle edition, location 8648.

Prayer: All-Powerful God, help us to face our enemies and to stay deeply rooted in your love. Give us the strength and power to keep the commitment we just made. Continue to remind us that you are the judge and you will take care of our troubles. We let go of all the hurt and anger and pain that is keeping us from being deeply rooted in your love. Let us feel your peace in this situation and in our lives. Amen.