

Festival of Preaching

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Who knows this agony? A reflection
on psalms 88 and 89 | Malcolm Guite

Psalms 88 and 89 from *David's Crown*

Psalm 88: LXXXVIII *Domine Deus*

My saviour's words of welcome 'all is well'
Was that just some false dream I used to have?
I tremble once more on the brink of hell,

Soon I'll be weeping in its lowest pit. The grave
Would be a kinder place than this. The dead
Forget, but I remember and I grieve

For all that I have lost: the green leaves shed
And stripped from me, my lovers and my friends
All torn away. Just emptiness and dread

Are my companions now. No one defends
Or speaks for me. Lord, I have cried to you
And you say nothing. Empty silence rends

My heart in pieces. There is no one who
Can find me now, for who could ever know
This agony unless they felt it too?

Psalm 89: LXXXIX *Misericordias Domini*

Who knows this agony unless they feel it too?
You answer me in darkness from your cross,
It is your pain that draws my heart to you

As deep calls unto deep and loss to loss.
Your covenant was sealed in your heart's blood
When it is pierced with mine. And our cries cross

In flesh and blood as I encounter God,
Not on the heights, but in the pit of hell.
Then I can sing the triumph of the good

Then I can truly know all will be well.
I recognise my saviour's mighty arm
Because it has been pierced. The bloody nail

Means more to me than those who see no harm
And keep God as a talisman, a spell
A cosy comforter, a lucky charm.