



*Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me;  
they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.  
(Psalm 22: 12-13 NRSV*

Bashan was a region of ancient Israel northeast of the Sea of Galilee. It would be in what is today southeastern Syria. It was known in biblical times for the cattle raised there in the rich pastureland. During certain times of the year, the cattle were allowed to graze in free-range fashion. Out from the more densely populated villages, the herds were left to graze unsupervised. While grazing, some of the cattle took on the behavior of wild animals. So, it was a real possibility that some person wondering through these pastures might find himself or herself surrounded by bulls. The potential for the animals to inflict bodily harm was real.

The bulls of Bashan were an actual circumstance for these Old Testament folks. They are an agrarian metaphor that we can also readily appreciate. The bulls represent demands we cannot ignore, obligations we cannot fail to meet, and duties we cannot shirk. Who likes being surrounded by these metaphorical bulls, being gored by demands, and listening to a lot of bull with open mouths "like a ravening and roaring lion."

Persons in recognizable scenarios experience the bulls. How about the "sandwich generation"-- people who are caring for aging parents while still getting kids through college? How about parents of young children who hear the roar of the bulls? How about retirees trying to navigate and negotiate a complicated and costly healthcare system? How about children with special learning challenges trying to make progress in their lessons?

There is no quick-fix solution to the reality of the bulls. But what we can latch onto is the great prayer within this same psalm: "Do not be far from me, for trouble is near." Like us, the psalmist was aware of the close proximity of the demands on his life. What the psalmist prays for is not for God to make the bulls vanish, but only for God to be closer to him than the bulls. That is the promise in the prayer-- that God is closer to us than the demands breathing upon us. God truly is nearer to us than the bull!

Let us pray. . .  
*Lord God, be nearer to me today than any responsibility or demand,  
known or unknown. Amen*