

Sunday 28th June 2020

Readings: Psalm 13

Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18

Psalm 13 The Message (MSG)

A David Psalm

13 ¹⁻² Long enough, GOD—
you've ignored me long enough.
I've looked at the back of your head
long enough. Long enough
I've carried this ton of trouble,
lived with a stomach full of pain.
Long enough my arrogant enemies
have looked down their noses at me.
³⁻⁴ Take a good look at me, GOD, my God;
I want to look life in the eye,
So no enemy can get the best of me
or laugh when I fall on my face.
⁵⁻⁶ I've thrown myself headlong into your arms—
I'm celebrating your rescue.
I'm singing at the top of my lungs,
I'm so full of answered prayers.

Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18 The Message (MSG)

An Ethan Prayer

89 ¹⁻⁴ Your love, GOD, is my song, and I'll sing it!
I'm forever telling everyone how faithful you are.
I'll never quit telling the story of your love—
how you built the cosmos
and guaranteed everything in it.
Your love has always been our lives' foundation,
your fidelity has been the roof over our world.
You once said, "I joined forces with my chosen leader,
I pledged my word to my servant, David, saying,

*‘Everyone descending from you is guaranteed life;
I’ll make your rule as solid and lasting as rock.’”*

*Blessed are the people who know the passwords of praise,
who shout on parade in the bright presence of God.
Delighted, they dance all day long; they know
who you are, what you do—they can’t keep it quiet!
Your vibrant beauty has gotten inside us—
you’ve been so good to us! We’re walking on air!
All we are and have we owe to God,
Holy God of Israel, our King!*

These past few weeks I have kept a very basic diary of what has been going on in my life during the lockdown. I am not a journal writer by any means, and I realise some people are extremely good at it. I thought though, it would be a good idea to just list some thoughts about this strange period we're living through. I have also made a list of all the things I have managed to get done - and, particularly for a list-maker like me, I can report that the list is pleasingly long. Things that have been waiting for months, or even years to get sorted through have finally been ticked off the 'to-do' list and added to the 'done' list. I have also written down my feelings. These have varied from one extreme to another. The feeling of not being in control has been one that has been with me from the beginning. During these 14 weeks, however, I have learnt not to let that feeling make me anxious anymore, and I have found that prayer and Bible reading each day has really helped to settle my heart at the moment.

Each Sunday I have been writing a reflection on one of the lectionary readings for the week. The Lectionary lists a reading from the Old Testament, New Testament and a Psalm. If I was leading worship in church then I would use a few verses from the Psalm as the opening call to worship. I think that is the way that many people use the Psalms. We dip in and out finding a few verses here and there that speak to us in the moment.

However, this week I want to point you particularly to the book of Psalms, and I am reflecting on the Psalm readings for today. I would suggest, that during these difficult times, the Psalms are exactly where we should go to find a voice to speak to God about the things that concern us.

The book of Psalms is easy to find in your bible. If you hold your bible and open it in the middle, you will find yourself in the Psalms. The book contains 150 poems, prayers and hymns written by a variety of authors from around 1440BC until about 538BC. They were written in Hebrew in a poetic style that still seems to come across beautifully even in

their English translation. Some are very famous: Psalm 23 'The Lord's my Shepherd' is so famous some people don't even realise it is from the Bible. Many have been put to modern music. Many of our favourite hymns are based on the Psalms. But when we really start to read them we find they speak to God in ways that sometimes surprise us. Some seem inappropriate or angry, some bitter and heart-broken, some filled with praise and thanksgiving. It is for these reasons that I invite you to spend the next weeks or so reading the Psalms, for in them you will find the voice you need too.

Eugene Peterson, American Presbyterian minister, scholar, theologian, author, and poet, paraphrased the Bible into a version known as The Message. Reading the Psalms in The Message gives us a new insight into their meaning and makes them even more relevant to us, for Eugene writes them in the kind of language that we can relate to - it is sometimes a rather American voice but we can forgive that. The two Psalms in today's readings I have printed from The Message, so we can read them in modern day words and phrasing. Interestingly, Psalm 13 starts very much as a 'shouting at God' poem, whereas Psalm 89 is more a song of praise and adoration. It is so freeing to see such different sentiments expressed in the Bible and to realise that it is okay to shout at God when we don't understand what is going on, when we feel that God is distant and ignoring our pleas. But it is also wonderful to find beautiful words to express our love and gratitude to God our Father. It is also worth noting that the Psalms that begin with shouting at God, end as in Psalm 13, with rejoicing in God's saving grace and faithfulness.

Jesus knew the Psalms inside out. He, along with His disciples and all Jewish people, then and now, would know them by heart for they would have spoken and sung them in worship as they grew up. In the same way that we can remember words of songs we heard when we were just children, the music and words of the Psalms would just have become part of who they were. When we read the New Testament we find it peppered with references to the Psalms, not only in the story of Jesus in the Gospels, but also in Paul's epistles and in other books in the New Testament. Jesus used the Psalms as people have done down the centuries, as a way of finding the words He needed when He didn't have words of His own. The last words He spoke, as He hung on the cross: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me' (Matthew 27:46) are straight from Psalm 22:1.

The Psalms have been the prayer book for God's people for thousands of years. In them we can find the words we need to speak, when our own words fail us. The Psalms give us permission to speak to God about anything. They give us permission to shout and cry out to God in anger and despair, and give us the words to use to do that. They can bring comfort and restore hope too when we don't know where else to turn. To discover that words written over 3000 years ago can speak to us in our modern day world and situations is truly amazing. They resonate with us as easily as they did with the people of Israel who heard them during the time of David, who spoke them during their exile to Babylon, who heard Jesus speak them to his followers and Paul write them to the new

Christian communities being established around the Mediterranean. They heard them in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. We read them today in English and they are still every bit as powerful.

To find words in the Bible which shout and rant at God, may seem strange. However, our God is a God who wants to know everything about us. He loves us and wants us to share all our joys and sorrows, disappointments and hopes, worries and doubts with Him. The Psalms are there to help, us, His people do just that.

So, I hope this reflection will encourage you to spend time in the book of Psalms. You will find old favourites, and perhaps discover some new ones. The Psalms tell the story of creation, the story of the people of God, and direct us to the promise of a Messiah who will return and restore our relationship with God our Father. That Messiah was Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Use the Psalms in your prayers and worship, and may they become familiar as you read and absorb them more and more, until you find that when you are in a situation where words of your own fail you, God will give you the words you need, straight from the Psalms.

Amen

There is a very good 8 minute video by the Bible Project, which gives a good overview of the Book of Psalms. May I recommend it to you -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgphNEaPrv8>

Music:

I will wait for you (Psalm 130) Keith & Kristyn Getty

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJUqY_6tqo

Benediction

(from Rev. Nora Vedress, Pastor at Calvary United Church in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada.)

So now we leave this space of worship
And while so much of the road ahead is uncertain,
the path constantly changing,
we know some things that are as solid and sure
as the ground beneath our feet,
and the sky above our heads.

We know God is love.

We know Christ's light endures.
We know the Holy Spirit is there,
found in the space between all things,
closer to us than our next breath,
binding us to each other,
until we meet we again,

Go in peace.

Wash your hands.

Love your neighbours.

You are not alone.

Amen