

Text: Psalm 16 (Easy English Version)

Sunday 26th April 2020

Brightons Parish Church

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Boys and girls – adults even: do you find it easy to pray? Give me a thumbs up for “yes” or down for “no”.

I must admit, I don't find it easy to pray – even after nearly two decades of following Jesus. And in these uncertain times, when things are hard and life is not normal, there's a part of me that's not sure what to pray.

So, I think the Psalms, these prayers of God's people might help us at this time, their content might help us to express both our joys and our sorrows, our hopes and our fears.

This psalm, this prayer, was written by David – boys and girls, do you remember David from the Bible? I think we put a picture or two on our Facebook page to colour in. When we first meet David in the Bible, what's he doing? Do you remember? Is he singing a song? Is he looking after sheep? Or is he fighting against Goliath? Which picture would you pick? (PAUSE)

The right answer is: he is looking after the sheep. He's a young man and no one thinks very much of him, yet God sends the prophet Samuel to tell David that David will be the next king of Israel. But between that point and eventually becoming king, David had a lot of adventures.

Now, boys and girls, how do you think David's adventures made him feel? Hands up for happy, hands down for worried or scared. (PAUSE)

I think it might have been a bit of both actually. David had some really great times, but there were others which were hard for him. Just because he had been chosen by God to be the future king, did not mean that David had an easy life. In fact, it's very possible that this psalm was written whilst David had to run away for his own safety.

But in those times David learnt many powerful lessons. Maybe this lay behind his words in v7: 'In the dark nights, you help me to learn what is right.' Is David meaning the dark nights of the soul, those dark seasons? Is David meaning that he sits up a night, maybe with worry? But in those wee hours of the night too, he learns, he grows, he is instructed by God to see God, and his own life, and his problems rightly. We don't really know and that's part of the beauty of poetry.

Our psalm begins with these words though: ‘Please keep me safe, God, because I come to you for help.’ (v1) It sounds like David is in a tough time, so David goes to God for help, David takes refuge in God.

Boys and girls, have any of you ever been camping in a tent? Why don’t you come out with me just now to my garden where I have a tent? (MOVE)

Welcome to my tent. I wanted to tell you a story about the first time I went camping as a Cub Scout. I was only about 8 years old at the time and I was super excited. But can you guess what happened that weekend? (PAUSE)

It rained – it rained a lot. In fact, one of my few memories of that weekend is that it rained. So, we had to shelter in our tent.

But even though it was my first time away from home and was raining so badly, I did not feel scared or want to go home. I think part of what helped me was that the tent became a refuge but it was the presence of my Cub Scout Leader, Liz Ferguson, who really helped to make it feel like that, and if Liz is watching just now, hi Liz!!

Liz made that tent more than simply a tent, she made it a refuge, a place of shelter, even in the middle of a storm. Her presence, what she said and did, got me through, and when I think back to that experience, the only picture in my memory, is looking out the door of the tent, with Liz sitting near the entrance, and rain falling in the background. On one level I was aware of what was happening outside, but on another, I wasn't, because that tent and the presence of Liz, filled my horizon, I wasn't worried, and so I was at peace and I knew joy.

David said, ‘Please keep me safe, God, because I come to you for help...[in you I take refuge]...in the dark nights, you help me...’(v1, 7b). Friends, where are you sheltering in these difficult days? What is capturing your attention and filling your horizon? Is it only the problems, is it only the rain? Or is there space in your life for God? Will you allow Him to fill your horizon?

But how do we do that? Well, let’s go back inside. (MOVE)

So, how did God fill David’s horizon? And how did David allow that to happen? The psalm gives us a few ideas.

V1 – David says he’s in trouble and he needs God’s help. But in v2, he says, ‘You are my Lord’: You are my God, You are my provider, You are the one who gives life says David.

And so David recognises that all the good things in his life come from God, they are God's gift, and that's an idea picked up by James, the brother of Jesus, **who said: 'Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father...' (James 1:17)**

So, here's an idea – by yourself or with others, make either a list or begin a mural, of the good things God has given you? We put up that idea for families on the Facebook page, so you might have some resources to hand already. Because remembering God's good gifts changed the whole outlook for David and it can change our outlook as well, even in tough times.

I had to put this idea into practice recently, because I was wrestling with something, something that I found really hard. But in the song I spoke **about before Easter**,...

‘Alive and Breathing’, I found words which helped lift my eyes to God and change my perspective. Instead of only seeing the one thing I struggled with, I started to see the good things of God and He began to fill my horizon.

So, maybe this afternoon or this week, write a list, make a mural, find a song, but do something which enables you to remember the good things in your life, each of which is a gift from God.

From this place of trust and thankfulness, the rest of the psalm flows, building to verse 7 where **David makes a choice. He says, ‘*I will* praise the Lord...’ – I will. I wonder friends, have we learnt that lesson, the lesson of choosing to praise God, even amidst our circumstances?**

It might not be joyful or happy praise, but we can choose to praise. Our circumstances just now may make us feel worried, scared, even powerless. But you still have a choice: a choice to praise God, to say with David, “I will praise the Lord, who is my Lord, my refuge, my portion” – and when we choose to do that, God again fills our horizon because our focus is then on God.

I remember an occasion about 9 years ago when I was finding life hard. At that time, I was working for the Scouts actually and driving home from the Borders. I had some worship music on, as I usually did, but I was holding back from singing because of my circumstances. Yet in the course of that journey, I chose to worship, I exerted my will, and it was like a door opened for me; as I chose to praise God I came into a new depth of relationship...

with Him, and I began to grow in faith, hope and peace once more. I wonder, do you need to choose praise this week so that God might fill more of your horizon?

The final verses of this psalm are quoted in Acts chapter 2 by the apostle Peter, for he sees in them a foretelling of the resurrection of Jesus, because Jesus was not left in the deep hole of death, His body did not spoil, but rather He was raised to life to be with His heavenly Father forever. We thought of this only a few weeks ago at Easter and that Jesus is our living Lord who gives us hope.

I wonder friends, are we giving the living Lord space in our lives? We may be in the dark night of the soul, but as we find ways to weave in thanksgiving and praise, which are expressions of trust, we create space...

to refuge in our God, and from there He can fill our horizon, changing our whole perspective, and infusing us with renewed hope.

I pray that we would be such a people, because as we give ourselves to God in this way, we will come to share the words of the psalmist, **knowing for ourselves that ‘He [the Lord] is close beside me...[He] will lead me along the path of life’ (v8, 11).**

May it be so. Amen.

Let us close with our final hymn, “Lord, for the years”.