

Song and Psalm Service, 10am, 9 September 2007

The Lord be with you: *And also with you.*

A warm welcome to you all and especially to any visitors. Our clergy are at Synod, so today's service will be a special morning prayer service based around the biblical Psalms, some of which have been the song of the Hebrews for 3000 years, in the Temple before the exile, during and after the exile, and to the present day. A number were most likely sung by Jesus and the Twelve at the Last Supper as 'hymns' as they left the upper room to go to the Mount of Olives. These were almost certainly the 'hallel' psalms, each containing 'hallelu-yah' "praise the Lord" with Ps 115-118 normally sung at the end of the Passover meal and Ps 113-114 at the beginning. And all the psalms have been used by the Christian Church from its very beginning 2000 years ago for both corporate worship and individual devotion.

Let us pray together:

Father, we pray through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, that you will open our hearts to your presence in our worship service this morning through the Psalms of your people throughout the ages prayed in word and song. We thank and praise you that we can come to you just as we are with our complexities and contradictions, fears and joys, and that you are a God of steadfast love who seeks genuine dialogue with us, encompassing all of our human weaknesses and emotions.

We also remember those who are not here, especially those at Synod. We pray that we all may be obedient to your will for our lives, to witness and work for the sake of your kingdom. AMEN

Please stand to sing two songs linked to Psalm 95:

- ❖ Let us sing to the God of salvation
- ❖ Here I am to worship

[lighting of Sunday School candle and prayer]

Some psalms herald the new day and are linked to morning prayer:

My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make melody. Awake, my soul! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn. (Ps 108: 1-2)

I, O Lord, cry out to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you (Ps 88:13)

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days (Ps 90:14).

Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning (Ps 30:5)

We can use Psalms to acknowledge God's creation:

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture (Ps 100:3)

When you sent forth your spirit, we are created, and you renew the face of the ground (Ps 104:30)

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,

*the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?
Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honour ...
O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth! (Ps 8)*

The Book of Common Prayer only used psalms - hymns were only authorised in the Church of England in the 19th century. The dissenting 'father' of English hymnody, Isaac Watts (d. 1748) composed many hymns as paraphrases of psalms that are still sung like *Praise my Soul the King of Heaven* (Ps 103) and *O God our help in ages past* (Ps 90) that was sung at this morning's Christ Church 8am service. Martin Luther's *A Mighty Fortress is our God* is based on Psalms 46 (and 71), and there are many wonderful versions of *The Lord is my Shepherd* (Ps 23).

Please stand to sing two songs linked to psalms 23 & 42:

- ❖ Have faith in God
- ❖ As the Deer

[Please be seated.] The rich poetry in the 150 psalms combine five collections, the first four of which conclude with a doxology of praise to God and the fifth concludes the whole collection in praise. Together, they have been described as 'a book of hope rooted in the midst of loss and darkness where God is surprisingly present'. While hope, praise and thanksgiving is their final direction, the most

common type of psalm is the psalm of lament in which anger, illness, death, hunger, greed, enemies, injustice and the whole gamut of human emotion is brought individually and corporately before God. Links to corporate worship can be seen in the oft-repeated word *Selah* about which there is no scholarly consensus but which may mean a 'lifting up' response of the assembled congregation or an instrumentalist interlude.

Sometimes the Old Testament language is too violent for us to pray it literally (eg Ps 137:9 about 'dashing little ones against the rock'), but this aspect of negative emotion and lament can be viewed as part of our dark or shadow side as humans and as members of a particular society and culture with all of its idolatries and imperfections. While joy is good, lament is often lost in today's worship songs and I think it needs to be reclaimed and balanced if we are to pray authentically in a true dialogue culminating in praise and thanksgiving.

U2's song '40' from the 1984 *War* album, is based on Psalm 40 and cries out to God asking 'how long' it will be before a 'new song' of justice arrives. The 'how long' refrain is in other laments too (eg Ps 13:1-2). Bono and U2 are strong proponents of the psalms. Singing a 'new song' is also a theme in a number of psalms and Christians see it in the in-breaking of God's kingdom through Jesus Christ in contrast to the 'old song' of selfish humanity. [U2 '40'].

One of the great themes of the Psalms is justice and concern for widows, orphans, strangers and the destitute:

The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin (Ps 146:9)

The needy shall not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the poor perish forever (Ps 9:18)

Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked (Ps82:3-4)

Please stand for 2 songs linked to such psalms:

- ❖ Song of God's people
- ❖ I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever

[Please be seated.] The traditional translation 'mercies of the Lord' translates only a part of the nature of God understood in the Hebrew *hesed* which is perhaps least badly translated as 'steadfast love'. The Psalms can be used as the basis of confession and will pray together using the words from Psalm 139 and especially Psalm 51:

Let us pray together:

O, Lord, you have searched me out and known me.

You know when I sit down and when I rise up;

You discern my thoughts from far away.

You search out my path and my lying down,

and are acquainted with all my ways.

Have mercy on me, O God,

according to your steadfast love;

according to your abundant mercy

blot out my transgressions.

*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.*

*For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.*

*Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,.*

*You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.*

*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

Let me hear joy and gladness;

*Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.*

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.*

*Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.*

*Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

O Lord, open my lips,

and my mouth will declare your praise.

The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;

a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. AMEN

To give us a chance to reflect on our need for confession and forgiveness to become all that God wants us to be through Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit, I invite you to pray and perhaps light a candle while I play Allegri's

famous 17th century *Miserere Mei* which is the Latin wording of Psalm 51 much of which we have just prayed.
[**Allegrì Miserere mei**]

The Psalms contain words of redemption and assurance:
If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered. For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him there is great power to redeem (Ps 130: 3-4, 7)
The Lord is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth (Ps 145:18)
The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion for his children,
so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.
For he knows how we were made;
he remembers that we are dust, (Ps 103:8-14)
When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us,
you forgive our transgressions (Ps 65:3)
Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.
Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity,

and in whose spirit there is no deceit (Ps 32:1-2) AMEN

Sometimes our prayer life is dry and barren and amidst the distractions of our busyness we cannot find words to pray. At such times we can turn to the Psalms to help us in the knowledge that we are praying with the faithful across the millennia and also with many others around the world who are praying them right now, eg Psalm 130 helps start our prayers of petition leading into two songs to foster intercession from Jacques Berthier of Taizé linked to Psalms 103 & 102 for which we will stay seated:
Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! (Ps 130:1-2)

- ❖ Bless the Lord my soul
- ❖ O Lord hear my Prayer

[Ken King will now lead us in our prayers for the world]

Stillness and contemplation before God can also be very helpful as shown in Psalm 62: *For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him alone comes my salvation,* in Psalm 37: *Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him* and in Psalm 46: *Be still, and know that I am God!*

Let us stand and sing:

- ❖ In the silence

Of course, probably the greatest theme of the Psalms is praise to our God. As mentioned earlier, ‘Hallelujah’ means ‘praise the Lord’. Let us sing another song of praise

based on Psalm 141:2 during which time we will take up a collection for God's work:

❖ Let our praise to you be as incense

[Lord's prayer; Parish prayer]

We have only touched on a small sample of the richness in the Psalms. Hear also God's words of benediction:

*The Lord has been mindful of us; he will bless us;
he will bless those who fear him, both small and great.*

*May the Lord give you increase,
both you and your children.*

*May you be blessed by the Lord,
who made heaven and earth. (Ps 115:12-15)*

*May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us (Ps 67:1)*

*The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in,
from this time on and evermore (Ps 121:7-8)*

*Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
who alone does wondrous things.*

*Blessed be his glorious name forever;
may his glory fill the whole earth.*

Amen and Amen. (Ps 72:18-19)

[Notices and directions for morning tea]

We conclude our service by singing the new song 'Blessed be your name' we learned last week which combines lament and praise and then our recessional is the Victory Song based on Ps 60:12:

❖ Blessed be your name

❖ Victory Song

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord!

In Christ's name. AMEN