

## Psalm 25 – Advent

Have you ever thought about how much time you spend waiting? Waiting in lines at shops, waiting at home for parcels to be delivered, waiting for life to return to some sort of normality. There was a period of time after Kathy and I arrived with our sons in the Netherlands, that we too waited. We waited for over four years to get our permit situation sorted. It was a period of intense waiting, battles with the IND, disappointments, breakthroughs, and final victory – it was a time of expectant waiting and hope for a positive outcome.

As we enter Advent, we enter into this period of waiting, and we identify with those in ages past who also waited. We wait now to celebrate the birth of Jesus but also in a greater sense we wait for the return of Jesus.

Our Scripture passage today, Psalm 25, touches on several themes important to Advent – waiting with hope, God’s presence to help, God’s forgiveness, and God’s guidance.

The Psalm opens with the psalmist exclaiming, *“In you Lord I put my trust.”* Or as other translations interpret the Hebrew – *“I lift my soul or life up to you”*. This translation captures the idea of giving of one’s whole self to God – to do that requires trust. It’s like doing those trust falls in team building exercises where you fall backwards trusting and hoping the group will catch you. This is the image this expression creates. All that follows in the psalm flows out of this core attitude. Many things compete for our core attention in our life and faith – comfort, security, happiness, peace and the list goes on. This is something I have had to engage with at various points in my own walk with God – is it trust or something else. It raises the question for each of us as we read this psalm, what is at the core of our own orientation to life and faith? As we go on to learn in this psalm and others, this basic trust is not a naïve trust, or a trust that has no room for questions about life and faith. It is one that says - God I make a choice to trust you, to offer up my life including my doubts, fears, joys, strengths, weaknesses and more. I lift all these up to you.

The psalmist reveals in verse 2 that they are facing an unidentified enemy, risking being overcome and filled with some sense of shame. Yet the psalmist looks to God as the one to whom he can entrust his whole life. In verse three the NIV text reads that, *“those who hope in God will not be put to shame”* - the Hebrew word ‘hope’ can mean also mean *“to wait expectantly”*. To hope is to wait expectantly. The psalmist expresses the idea that those who hope in God, or who wait expectantly on God, will not be put to shame. They can hope or wait expectantly because they trust God. In the midst of trouble, the psalmist waits expectantly for God to hear their cry and help them in this situation.

Flowing out of this expression expectant hope, in verses 4-5 the psalmist shifts their focus and appeals for God’s guidance and direction. It is interesting to note that in this psalm the cry is not to be miraculously taken out of the situation but for God to be present in it. The psalmist makes three requests to God in quick succession – show me your ways, guide me in truth, and teach me. These words are all wisdom related words – they are about seeking God for the wisdom needed to deal with the situation they face.

The psalmist says in verse 5 that they hope in God all day long. The Hebrew word ‘hope’ used here is the same as used in verse 3 so can also be translated as ‘wait’. This is no quick fix deliverance, but the way out of trouble requires waiting expectantly for God’s guidance.

These are difficult times – a time of uncertainty, a time of increasing polarisation, a time when we may feel under pressure personally and as a church. Waiting and hoping are often not easy to do. There are often no quick fixes, but God’s presence and guiding hand is what we need. There were many times during our four long years of waiting for a permit that we struggled to wait with hope. There were times when hope was hiding. Yet through Scripture, being reminded of God’s calling, and the community of God’s people, I was

reminded to keep persevering, to keep hoping, and waiting expectantly for God to hear my cries and provide the wisdom needed. I don't know your situation, but in these times this psalm encourages us to persevere, to remember that God hears us, is present with us, and that we can trust God for the wisdom we need.

In verse 6 the psalmist turns their attention to God's great mercy and faithful love, seeking forgiveness for the wrongs they have committed. The psalmist starts with calling on God to remember God's own mercy and covenantal love. These descriptions of God go back to Exodus 34.6, *"The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."* The psalmist makes their appeal for forgiveness based on the very character of God. They seek to be reconciled to God, recognising that their sin has erected barriers between themselves and God. This is what forgiveness and reconciliation does – God removes the barriers we erect.

As we enter into this Advent season, waiting expectantly to celebrate the birth of Jesus, we are reminded of that through Jesus' death and resurrection, forgiveness is made possible, reconciliation with God is made possible, peace with God is made possible because God the compassionate, loving and merciful one took action in Jesus to deal with the barriers we erected.

Then, verses 8-9 flow out of seeking forgiveness and the psalmist acknowledges that God instructs sinners, guides the humble, and teaches God's ways – once again the psalmist seeks God's wisdom. The psalmist recognises that the only way to continue to live a life within God's peace was to live their life guided by God's wisdom. They wait expectantly with hope for this guidance. Where does this wisdom come from? The Bible speaks of this in several places. In Proverbs it says, *"the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom."* Jesus spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit in John 14.26, *"the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."* Also in John 16.13, *"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth."* In 2 Timothy 3.16, Paul writes, *"the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."*

God has not left us to blindly find ways to live faithfully. God has gifted us the Holy Spirit, Scripture and community to inform and shape our lives to reflect Jesus. And, just as the psalmist was waiting expectantly for God's guidance, we too are waiting. We are waiting and hoping for the wisdom we need to live in God's ways. We also wait for the return of Jesus. The question for me though is **how** do we wait? – that is a question we all wrestle with at times isn't it? We read in the gospel reading today in Luke 23, that in this time of waiting Jesus instructed his followers to, "Be always on the watch, and pray..." and in Luke 24 to be his witnesses in all the nations, witnesses of the good news of Jesus. This is not a passive waiting, not a sitting around kind of waiting, but an active waiting.

Our four-year wait for our permit to be granted wasn't a time of inactivity or passivity despite what the IND might have wanted. We carried on with the work and mission we came to the Netherlands to do. We needed God's wisdom to help us do what we were called to do. I believe this is the sense of waiting that the psalmist speaks of in this psalm, and that Jesus refers to. We are to seek God's guidance and teaching to live and serve God in the ways that Jesus has shown us – this requires much wisdom. We are to wisely fulfil the mission that Jesus left us with – to be a holy and just people, to be salt and light in society, to share the good news of Jesus, to be ministers of reconciliation in a world that needs to know of the love and justice of God. It is this that is to occupy our waiting – faithfully living out the life and mission that God has called us to, individually and as a church.

This hope is the message of Advent – hope filled, expectant waiting for God to be with us and guide us in the present, and to fulfil the promised return of Jesus. In Jeremiah 33.15-16 the prophet spoke of a time when

God would fulfil the promises made to God's people of a coming Messiah. In Jesus, we see this promise fulfilled. In the same way, we can trust that God will also fulfil the promises made regarding the God's ultimate victory and return of Jesus – we hope and wait expectantly. And while hope and wait, we live and serve.

Finally, I want to come back to the centre of this passage in verse 5. Here the psalmist refers to God as the one who is the Saviour. Psalm 25 reminds us to offer ourselves up to the one who is trustworthy, who can absorb our own fears, struggles, doubts, or worries, the one who can deal with sin, who offers forgiveness because of God's great compassion, mercy, and love. Jesus came as the one who would through his life, death and resurrection demonstrate clearly that God has heard our cries and in Jesus we have our Saviour – we can trust in the one on whom we wait because in Christ God has acted to redeem and reconcile us. This is the ultimate Christian hope. And while we wait, we ask God to show, teach and guide us, both personally, and as a church to be a ready, hope filled, expectant people on mission, loving and serving God, and reflecting Christ as we love and serve others.