

Passiontide/ Psalm 34; March 17th.

We have been covering the psalms.

Yet we remember the psalms are not to be taught but to be prayed.

Psalms – is the prayer book of the church.

As we begin Passiontide – the two weeks that lead us to Easter. Jesus takes words of the Psalms on his lips on the cross – My God My God; Psalm 22. and into your hand I commit my spirit – Psalm 31.

Psalms are to be prayed.

They open up a space to deepen with God in prayer.

We do not just say them.

Psalms can enrich our prayer lives with God.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says what they mean to us in prayer...

“And so we must learn to pray. The child learns to speak because his father speaks to him. He learns the speech of his father. So we learn to speak to God because God has spoken to us and speaks to us. By means of the speech of the Father in heaven, his children learn to speak with him. Repeating God’s own words after him, we begin to pray to him. We ought to speak to God and he wants to hear from us.”

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1970), 18-19).

Bonhoeffer was not someone who believed in cutting psalms short, or omitting some of the more problematic of these prayer and psalms. He believed that the psalms needed to be prayed in their entirety since “they mirror life with all its ups and downs, its passions and discouragements.”

Bonhoeffer loved to pray the Psalms because they offered him the sustaining and liberating power of God’s own words in coping with the vicissitudes of every day living...” *Prayer book of the Bible*, Bonhoeffer, pg 149.

Bonhoeffer would say that just as we learn from the Lord's Prayer how to pray, we learn also from the psalms how to pray...

Psalms give us a language. Sometimes we need to pray against our heart. We need to expand it, perhaps renew it, sometimes our heart towards prayer is in a place, where the psalms can help renew it.

Maybe, it is helpful for us to take a psalm a day or a psalm for a week, to take the words into us – Psalms are God's words – it shapes the way we approach God. Psalm 34 would be one worth using...

Psalm 34.

Many psalms are by David but we do not know when they relate to. Psalm 34 relates to a time of great threat in David's life – when he is fleeing from Saul – he is in his 20s David. He reaches King Achish, he faces great threat and pretends to be insane and survives. 1 Sam 21. Yet this psalm points to how David acted, following prayer. He sees his escape due to the hand of God than his own acting ability...

We are going to working through the psalm...

V1-7 = Words of Praise.

David. He is determined his life will be filled with thankfulness to God. His praise will always be on my lips he says.

For David he will boast in the Lord – not boasting in what he has received, but in God who is the source and giver of every good gift. As Paul says in 1 Cor 1:31, when discussing the work of Christ, his suffering 'let him who boasts boast in the Lord.'

We glorify the Lord – we cannot make God greater than he already is – but it is the cry of our hearts echoing what Jesus said in Jerusalem "Father, glorify your name." We desire his greatness will be shown to many others! As Mary said in the Magnificat 'My soul glorifies the Lord!' while Paul says, in prison in Phil 1 "I eagerly expect and hope that as always Christ will be exalted in my body whether by life or by death."

Praise we see, is offered here because of deliverance. David sought the Lord and he answered me, David says. He delivered me from all my fears..." The promise of those who look to him will be radiant – it does not matter if you are poor, unknown, God does not give special advantages to the wealthy, the well known the famous. He cares for those who rely on him, who fear him, who revere and respect him.

V8-14 Words of Encouragement.

David has found help in the Lord. So he encourages those around him 'to taste and see that the LORD is good.' His prayer has led him to grow in that confidence, especially in such difficult times, when he could have felt abandoned. He calls on others to also taste and see God is good. That too should take refuge in the Lord as David has done. That they should also trust that the Lord will meet all their needs.

That simple phrase – taste and see that the Lord is good...

Many of you have travelled across the world.

You perhaps have been offered some unusual foods at times, that perhaps you have never eaten or even seen before. Perhaps on first glance – what is this... yet perhaps or maybe often it turned out to be delicious... there was only one way to find out – to taste and see...

Who are we praying for, at this time, to taste and see...

The person who has lost that loving feeling as Top Gun sing.

Who has lost – the sense that the Lord is good,,,

But those outside the church who we pray for...

It is Ramadan, to pray for Muslims across Amersfoort, to taste and see that the Lord is good...

For individuals we know, work place colleagues college friends, class mates at school –

to taste and see that the Lord is good...

As we soak in this psalm, we hear its cry for others to discover this God, whom David praises... and it moves to us to continue to include those who do not know, on our prayer lists...

In the midst of this David talks about what is needed if we desire good life.

Peter uses these words in his letter 1 Peter to describe the life of a Christian believer. Peter introduces David's call to a righteous life, with the explanation 'to this you were called.'

Not to seek riches, power, popularity.

But – watch your words – keep your tongue from evil. What do you say about others? At the start of each university year, we had a speaker, Lloyd Cooke who would speak and one of his statements he repeated – if you aren't willing to say it to their face, don't say it at all – tackling that topic of gossip, slander...

Forsake all evil David says – turn from it. Repentance means a change of direction it is more than simply saying sorry.

And do good. Give yourself to doing good.

Seek peace and pursue it.

Actively seek and pursue peace in your relationships with others, even when it is difficult...

These words of David become fuel for our prayers...

What do we seek – is it riches, power, popularity.

The prayers he suggests we are praying – Lord keep my tongue from evil, from gossip, from slander.

Prayers – to see evil, to not be led into temptation, to turn from it when you know it is coming...

To give yourself to doing good – at times what God is stirring in our hearts – the good we long to see – may be he is inviting us to be part of his answer...

Prayer, actively seek peace and pursue it. Chase it. Where are you not at peace with someone – from your past – from your present – to pray that you would be a man or woman of peace, pursuing it...

V15-22 – Words of Wisdom and Comfort.

Like Psalm 1 – we see choices.

Do we choose to do what is right?

David states, as Peter reminds the Christians he writes to – the eyes of the Lord are on us, and his ears attentive to our cries. Such encouragement. The image of Revelation with the incense – the prayers of the saints – before the throne – we may wonder if they are heard, if they are there before the Lord, and yet the vision shown to John, his ears are attentive, the prayers do arise...

But does that mean no harm comes, no difficulty – David already knew of unjust suffering as Saul was hunting him. He knew that troubles would come – but when the righteous cry out, they know that his eyes are on us, and his ears listen to our prayers...

The troubles would be harsh and perhaps the main comfort would be – the Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves / delivers those who are crushed in spirit.

And the v20 – A righteous man may have many troubles but the Lord delivers him from them all, he protects all his bones and not one of them will be broken.

This verse is quoted when Jesus dies on the cross and his legs are not broken...

Deliverance may not be as expected... there will be troubles, but he promises to hear our prayers, his eyes are upon us...

Nicky Gumbel shares how he has a bible he uses to read through the bible each year. In its wide margins, he writes down the troubles he had faced as he came to those psalms. And then the following year, as he continued his reading pattern, he would return to that psalm, see the note of the trouble and often see how God had delivered him and as Gumbel says it would encourage him to cry out again, as David was...

The closing words of David do ask – what will we choose – the way of the righteous or the way of the wicked... and he declares that no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned... the call to come.

Conclusion.

Psalm 34, deepens our prayer as we reflect on these words, as a child we learn from the Father's words, words we can use when we see and know the goodness of God, who answers prayer for that special need.

Today is St Patrick's Day – when the Church remember the great apostle of Ireland – a man of prayer.

Patrick once said, remembering his youth, taken to Ireland as a slave (later Patrick returned to evangelise the island and saw many converted).

"After I had come to Ireland, I daily used to feed cattle, and I prayed frequently during the day; the love of God and the fear of Him increased more and more and faith became stronger, and the spirit was stirred ... before daylight I used to rise to prayer, through snow through frost, through rain and I felt no harm; nor was there any laziness in me, as I now perceive, because the spirit was then fervent within me..."

We end with a prayer which captures the feeling of David's psalm...

I arise today
Through God's strength to pilot me;
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's way to lie before me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's hosts to save me
Afar and anear,
Alone or in a multitude.
Christ shield me today
Against wounding.

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in the eye that sees me,
Christ in the ear that hears me.

I arise today
Through the mighty strength
Of the Lord of creation.