

## Reflection for Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> March – Anne Shave

Today's lectionary readings – the Bible readings many churches follow on a three-yearly cycle – include Ezekiel 37 (the valley of dry bones) and John 11 (the raising of Lazarus). But it seems appropriate to me to reflect on the Psalm set for today. It's just eight verses long, and is headed, in the Good News Bible, "A Prayer for Help."

### A Prayer for Help

**130** From the depths of my despair I call to you, LORD.

<sup>2</sup>Hear my cry, O Lord;

listen to my call for help!

<sup>3</sup>If you kept a record of our sins,

who could escape being condemned?

<sup>4</sup>But you forgive us,

so that we should stand in awe of you.

<sup>5</sup>I wait eagerly for the LORD's help,

and in his word I trust.

<sup>6</sup>I wait for the Lord

more eagerly than sentries wait for the dawn—

than sentries wait for the dawn.

<sup>7</sup>Israel, trust in the LORD,

because his love is constant

and he is always willing to save.

<sup>8</sup>He will save his people Israel

from all their sins.

There are four pairs of verses in the Psalm.

1. Call to God for help
2. Remember God's forgiveness
3. Wait
4. Hope

Today I would like to say just a little about each of these four things.

#### **1. Call to God for help (verses 1+2)**

Calling to God for help is probably coming quite naturally to many people at the moment – people who are unwell, or fearful, or under great strain, having financial difficulties, or struggling with issues that were already problematic for them before this global pandemic placed further burdens on them. I am sure a lot of us are calling to God for help, both for ourselves and for others.

How do we do it? I would just like to suggest a couple of forms of prayer that some may find helpful at this time. We don't need a lot of fancy words in prayer – God knows our need and our helplessness. The Psalm itself uses very simple language! But it may be helpful to have some tools to use in prayer at this time.

One way of praying that I learned some years ago that I have found helpful is simply to place my needs before God by placing my palms down on my knees and symbolically placing the burdens and concerns that I have before God – putting the people and situations that concern me into God's care. After doing that for some time, I turn my hands over so that my palms are facing upwards. This open gesture helps me to be open to receiving from God. I might ask for God's peace or wisdom or some other grace at this time, and wait quietly.

Another thing that I am finding particularly helpful at the moment is to be lighting a candle each evening at 7pm, and praying for others, knowing that other people are doing this too. The Anglican Bishop of this diocese suggested that Anglicans might like to pray in this way on Sunday evenings, but some Anglicans (including those in a small group I attend) have decided to try to observe this practice every evening at 7pm. If you would like to join in, then that would be wonderful. You could simply say the Lord's Prayer, or choose a Psalm to read aloud, or pray in whatever way the Holy Spirit leads you.

#### **2. Remember God's forgiveness (verses 3+4)**

At times of pressure, when we are anxious, when we feel isolated, or when we are living in close proximity with others, we may have moments when we are brought face to face with our own selfishness and need of God's

healing forgiveness. (We may, of course, also have a heightened awareness of the good in humanity as we look at those serving selflessly at this time.)

Michael Mayne, the former Dean of Westminster Abbey, has an explanation of sin which I find helpful: "By our sin I mean essentially that strange and compulsive self-love and self-concern which so diminishes the people we might be."

Elsewhere, Mayne says: "When Jesus commended the publican in the Temple whose only prayer was 'God have mercy on me, a sinner', and when he called on people to repent, he wasn't asking them to grovel or feel guilty. He was asking them to be honest with themselves about their own lives, to recognise the harm we do to ourselves and others by our self-centredness, and to respond afresh to the love God has for each of us in our uniqueness as that love is seen in Christ. We are to repent not because we are afraid, and not because we are threatened, but because we are loved."

When we come face to face with our need of forgiveness, during this time, let us come to God with our simple prayers and know his kindness to us. May we exercise kindness to others, also.

### **3. Wait (verse 5-6)**

Most of us consider "wait" to be a four-letter word!

In any context, waiting is not easy, because it engenders in us a sense of helplessness. But this can be spiritually fruitful.

Henri Nouwen somewhere commented that only in silence and solitude can we learn the important lessons that being is more important than having, that our worth is more than our efforts and not the same as our usefulness. These are perhaps the sorts of important lessons we might find ourselves reflecting on during this period of enforced waiting.

Waiting, patience, perseverance, endurance – these are qualities which are rated highly in Scripture. We can remember too that "patience" is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23: "But the spiritual nature produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

It will be interesting for us to reflect together, once this period of waiting is behind us, upon what spiritual lessons we feel we have learned.

### **4. Hope (verse 7+8)**

"Trust in the Lord" says the Good News Translation. The New International Version says, "Put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and the promise of redemption."

As people who believe in the resurrection of Jesus, we have an ultimate hope – the hope of eternal life – and also a present hope, that God is with us now by his Spirit. (I spoke about the hope we have in God's presence two weeks ago – that sermon is on the church website.)

Romans 8:38f says, "For I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels or other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below – there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Today, had we been at church, we would have sung the hymn, "All my hope on God is founded." Perhaps you might like to sing this first verse with me now.

All my hope on God is founded;  
he doth still my trust renew.  
Me through change and chance he guideth,  
only good and only true.  
God unknown,  
he alone  
calls my heart to be his own.

God bless you.