

“My times are in thy hand”

The readings for today if you wish to peruse them are: Acts 7: 55-60, Psalm 31: 1-5 & 15-16, 1 Peter 2: 2-10 and John 14: 1-14.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY – EASTER 5

“I come to you Lord, for protection... You are a righteous God; save me, I pray... Be my refuge to protect me; my defence to save me.” Here is a prayer cried out in earnest, a prayer seeking deliverance because of a dire predicament. King David has found himself without friends as a trap has been laid for him by his enemies, so he cries out to God to save him. For this psalm is a psalm of trust in the Lord. Only by trusting in God can he be saved. For King David knows that he is safe with the Lord: *“You are my refuge and defence; guide me and lead me as you have promised.”*

No psalm expresses a stronger trust in the Lord when powerful forces threaten the well-being of the believer. Trust is at the centre of David’s worship and service to the Lord God and it should be at the heart of our service today. Just like David if we have that solid foundation then we too will not fear what the world throws at us. For a lot of people in the present world, especially in our society, a lot of them are fearful and it is playing havoc with their well-being and mental health. One of the unfortunate side effects of our lockdown is people are left to think, to deal with who they are and for many people they are not happy with what they see or know about themselves, so they start to struggle spiritually because of lack of faith they find themselves adrift, whereas here in the Psalm we find someone who has faced his problems and instead of getting anxious he has turned it all over to the Lord, why? The Lord is a fortress in to which David and all believers put their trust and their prayers. They fully commit themselves to His eternal care and once they have passed their worries onto Him, they leave it with Him knowing that He will deal with it. We all know the old adage, a problem shared is a problem halved, well with God a problem shared is a problem dealt with fully, for with Him our burdens are taken away.

Here in the Psalm we are taught that within the Lord lies the antidote to all crisis: but prayerful, trustful and a devoted seeking of God is required, in other words we must go to God in prayer and hold nothing back, and at the same time we must do it with a knowing heart, for He listens to all our prayers. It is interesting that in this last week it was noticed that there has been a huge increase of people turning to God in prayer and listening in or turning on online church services. This is because in times of crisis

people suddenly realise what they are missing and so turn to God and seek His peace and the Psalm is teaching us to do just that.

The Bible always speaks of God as being a rock and a fortress which symbolises a strong place to stand, a secure place and an inaccessible place to occupy, here within the Lord God Almighty is safety. After all it is not only King David's life that is at stake it is the honour of God as well in the safety of his servant "*guide me and lead me as you have promised.*"

"Into thine hand I commit my spirit" is how the King James Version of the Bible quotes verse 5, but we will be more familiar with it as Jesus' words on the cross, the words of victory, the words which lead to our salvation and redemption.

Now this call to trust is repeated by Jesus in John's Gospel: "*Do not be worried and upset...Believe in God and believe also in me.*" The disciples had just received some bad news about what was to lie ahead for Jesus, but we have once again the antidote to fear, to troubled times and that lies in that one word uttered by Jesus "*BELIEVE*"

Jesus' words spoken in the Gospel have given countless numbers of Christian's hope throughout the years as they have faced, hardships, imprisonment, torture and even death, but throughout it all lies their hope and belief that Jesus holds the key to life eternal where we will be at peace for evermore. This hope is still very much alive today in our world, even though our media like to portray it otherwise, the truth is that the Gospel of Christ is alive and well and is giving hope to billions in the world today, so do not sit at home and be worried, come to Jesus and let Him take your burden away, He is just waiting to hear from you. Add to this the fact that Jesus follows the words with: "*There are many rooms in my Father's house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so.*" These words imply permanence, a durability that will never go away. God has set these places aside for you and for me, for all who truly believe and trust in the Lord. These words bring encouragement to all who face troubling times or who are anxious and afraid or who just plain doubt. These words bring about one vivid truth that God has provided ample provision in heaven for all his people.

The preparation or the setting aside these places has been achieved through the death and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. "*And after I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am. You know the way that leads to the place where I am going.*" But we like many people who

hear these words we find that Thomas voiced his misunderstanding when he uttered words that ring a bell with many who do not recognise who Jesus really is, or who don't know where to turn – *“Lord, we do not know where you are going; so how can we know the way to get there?”* Thomas was taking it literally as if Jesus were talking about going away on a holiday, but without telling them where or how to get there.

The other problem that faces people today is that they fail to identify themselves with Christ. But Jesus is telling us that he is the way, the truth, and the life. It is a fact that there is no other way except through Jesus for salvation. Jesus is not one way among many, but the only way to achieve life and to receive life you have to accept the truth that he is God incarnate, God made flesh, He died for us, He was dead and buried in a sealed tomb for three days and rose in glory and is alive in heaven, He is the Risen Christ, the Son of God, our Saviour and our friend. Only through the truth do we realise that Jesus is the answer. But still there is misunderstanding in the world, we even see it with Jesus' disciples for Philip voices another common reply by the unbelieving people, not just of Jesus time but of today: *“Lord, show us the Father; that is all we need.”* Like many people in our society today, Philip wanted a direct revelation of God; he wanted physical proof to satisfy his unbelief. So, it is no wonder that Jesus rebuked his disciples *“For a long time I have been with you all; yet you do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father...Do you not believe...that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?”*

The disciples should have believed Jesus, for he appealed to them for two reasons, on what he said and on what he did. They should have realised that the miracles that he performed could only be the works of God. *“The words that I have spoken to you...do not come from me.”* The teachings of Jesus do not come from a human being but come instead from the divine presence of God himself; after all there was an inseparable connection between Jesus' words and his work.

Once more Jesus pleads with his disciples *“Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”* Saving faith is trust in a person, but it must also have factual content. Faith includes believing that Jesus is one with the Father. *“I am telling you the truth: whoever believes in me will do what I do – yes, he will do even greater things, because I am going to the Father.”* Faith, belief, and trust in the Lord will allow us to do great things in his name, through the power of the Holy Spirit which comes directly from God. And so Jesus encourages us all to ask in his name for strength of faith, strength of works and more importantly for us

all because he is the “*way, the truth and the life*” all that we ask in his name will be done here on earth. Now there is a reason to believe and to trust, because in Jesus Christ the Son of God there lies hope!

PRAYER

Father we come to you today in prayer to help us with our worries. We come to you anxious and afraid, for we are worried for our loved ones, some we can see and especially for those we cannot see or be near at their time of need they find themselves separated. For many this is an enormous burden, so we ask in Jesus holy name to ease that burden, to comfort them and grant them all your peace.

It has been seven weeks since we went into lockdown Lord, it has been a long time and it is wearing on us, so help us to pray for those who need your support today. We know you are there and are never away from us and for that we thank you. Today we lean on your strength for in Christ our Lord we can do anything because He strengthens us, this is true and it helps us to keep going, again we thank you for this knowledge, all we ask is that you guide our words and our prayers so that we can bring the same message to others in need so they too can find and know your peace and strength.

Lord as the death toll rises and people get more worried about lack of PPE and elderly relatives in care homes seemingly abandoned, we remember today and leave all the key workers wherever they work in your hands. You are our rock, our strength our fortress and so we pray in your holy name to protect them all and bring them home safely to their loved one so they can rest in your love. Finally, Lord we ask you to give wisdom to the leaders and the peoples of this country so that we can all do our bit and come out the other end of this pandemic stronger, better people. Amen.