

The Psalms – Worship

*Let us stand to sing the psalms in such a way that our minds are in harmony with our voices.**

The psalms have been a part of our Christian tradition from the very beginning. Jesus knew them and referred to them. They were a central feature of worship in the Jewish tradition; composed as songs and poems over a period of approx. 800 years and collected together in the Jewish liturgy as the “Book of Praises” in about 200BC. They are an inspiration and a vehicle for devotion coming down the centuries to us like an arrow from God. Aimed at us personally and at our church liturgy.

Worship: to show intense love, devotion, praise, reverence. These dictionary words only give us a clue as to what worship means, because, as anyone who has been in love will tell you, it is a felt response as much as it is a rational one. Sadly, in these present times worship is often directed inappropriately towards things, celebrity, political causes and sporting heroes. It seems that as human beings we are hard-wired to worship. When we consider this we can see that every psalm is a worship psalm, even the sorrowful ones. Because they acknowledge God as the supreme power, the Creator who loves us and intends nothing but good for us, to whom we owe our passionate devotion; our God to whom we can pray, appeal, and can always trust.

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord (Ps130)

We must acknowledge at the very centre of our being that God is! He is not just an idea or proposition but a reality, and that we his children must deal with that fact and show our devotion accordingly.

The psalms help us to put ourselves in right relationship to him and the more we read them, sing and recite them, and learn, them the closer we will come to fulfilling God’s purpose for us in praise and worship.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. (Ps 103)

O come let us sing to the Lord, let us heartily rejoice in the rock of our salvation. (Ps 95)

O be joyful in the Lord all the earth; serve the Lord with gladness and come into his presence with a song. (Ps 100)

St Paul tells us that when we do not know how to pray properly, then the Spirit comes to help us in our weakness (Romans 8.26) for The word of God is something alive and active (Heb 4.12). The psalms can speak to our situation, reflect our responses and unlock the vocabulary and expression we need when our hearts prompt us to pray and worship; but we struggle or worry that our prayers are weak and cannot fully express what we want say to God.

Last week, when Rev Nathan was opening this little series of talks about the psalms, I was with my community in Salisbury, and thinking of you.

*Seven times a day do I praise you, because of your righteous judgements. (Ps119.64)**

This one psalm verse has set the benchmark for daily worship since the earliest times, and it is still observed in the offices of many religious communities, and this is true of my own. The day begins early with Lauds (worship) and psalm 95, setting the day in context, acknowledging our duty to worship, and drawing strength and encouragement for the day from our profound and unbreakable relationship with our Father God.

The underlying principle then of psalm worship is **humility**, based on a true assessment of ourselves in relation to a supreme being who is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. And, what a wonderful release it is to give up, let go and abandon ourselves to the love and care of Almighty God!

O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you; my soul is athirst for you. (Ps 63.1)

As we contemplate the psalms and become familiar with them it becomes more and more apparent that it is our heartfelt intention to find ways of worship in them that matters, more than just a reception of the words, as dynamic and moving as they are. If our hearts are in the right place, our minds will follow; and the psalms will begin to colour our lives. The Jews believed (and some still do) that God lives in Jerusalem; that he is seated in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. God reigns in Zion and that is where you will find him and encounter him. A good question then for each of us is: Where is your own Zion?

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! (Ps 84.1)

Worshipping with the psalms will help us to answer that question and shape our prayers and devotions accordingly.

*Those who need to learn some of the psalter or readings should study them.**

*So that in all things God may be glorified**

It is a very good idea, when beginning a new, or refreshed, relationship with the psalms to start with single verses; sentences which attract our attention we can own and incorporate into our planned, and spontaneous worship. They can preface our prayers; surface during the needs of the day; and be comforting companions as we fall asleep. They can be repeated slowly and carefully, and they will soon imprint themselves on our memory. As a start, try these psalm 1st verses:

O Lord our governor, how glorious is your name in all the world. (Ps 8)

I love you, O Lord my strength; the Lord is my crag, my fortress and my deliverer. (Ps 18)

As the deer longs for the water brooks, so longs my soul for you, O God. (Ps 42)

On God alone my soul in stillness waits; from him comes my salvation. (Ps 62)

God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us. (Ps 67)

Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvellous things. (Ps 98)

To you I lift up my eyes, to you that are enthroned in the heavens. (Ps 123)

There are many, many more; so perhaps you could make a more complete list of first verses which appeal to you, as part of your Lent. If Psalm worship and devotion are right for you, you will soon know!

*What is not possible to us by nature, let us ask the Lord to supply by the help of his grace.**

Roddy S.