

“Crisis to Confidence”

29 August 2021 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call to Worship

Reading: Philippians 4:4-9

Hymn of Preparation: IPH 424(i) Rejoice, the Lord is King!

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Reading: Psalm 13

Psalter: Psalm 40:1-5a

Reading: John 14:1-6,25-27

Sermon:

We come to the end of our short summer series on the Psalms 7-13. The Psalms deal with everyday life situations, both good and bad in relationship with God. These songs are helpful to us because they deal with our experiences in life and express for us, our feelings and emotions, our questions and concerns. All good poetry and songs attempt to do this. The Psalms do this with reference to God, so the situations of life are literally spoken of and contemplated in relation to the presence of God and faith in God. They are faith songs about life.

Psalm 13 like most of the Psalms starts in a crisis or difficulty being faced by David the writer and yet in bringing the situation to God hope is found that encourages and enables the Psalmist to keep going. It is a complaint to God, a questioning of God but as David writes and sings remarkably, he ends up trusting, rejoicing and singing in the realisation that God has been good to him. This transition from crisis to confidence is why the Psalms are helpful for people of faith since they have been written.

Our service today has been led by members of Living well, our senior members group and I know that they enjoy the Psalms because as they have lived out their lives they have faced difficult times and situations. The threat posed by Covid has been significant for our elderly the reality of death and ill-health has brought fear, the threat of infection has brought isolation and separation from church, family and community and their vulnerability to the virus has made life extremely difficult. We can be reasonably certain that David's problem was not covid but v3b suggests he may have been unwell and facing the prospect of death, but somehow in his circumstances he is able to have complete confidence in God. He has moved from crisis to confidence.

The Psalm doesn't only apply to the struggles of being old and afraid of death, it includes the struggle of living as a Christian in a world that is hostile to our faith and love for Jesus and such hostility can also lead to a crisis in faith. Jesus said, *“In the world you will have trouble”*, John 16:33 Are you and I surprised by the difficulty of the Christian life, and the hostility of the world? I suppose we are guilty of sanitising the reality of following Jesus, and when the good things we enjoy, the blessings, are taken away we say to ourselves, Why Lord? How long O Lord?

This is the lovely thing about the bible and the Psalms in particular, they are honest, they admit the messiness of life, the unfairness of life, its difficulties and even brutality. They understand the vagaries of illness, and old age, of hostility to faith and the confusion this brings. Many of us like our lives simple and sanitised, we struggle with the reality in Afghanistan or Eritrea for Christians or when it does get difficult and messy for us in Dublin City. This Psalm is an honest heartfelt plea to God when life sucks and becomes intolerable. It is an individual lament of David who desires to teach the people of God and those who are not and are looking for hope, how and why they can have confidence in God during life's crises.

I. Crisis of faith (v.1-2)

David has a problem with God because God appears to have forgotten him and turned away. His prayers are not answered, he hears nothing in return, and this has been the reality for some time. If you are feeling abandoned by God, then this is a word for you.

David has a problem with himself. His mind is active, unsettled, anxious, and sad. There is a sense in the phrase, *"How long must I wrestle with my thoughts"* that he has thought of numerous plans, tried to work it out as we say, but everything comes up blank. Maybe he has been critical and ends up in the dead end of bitterness, maybe he has been full of self-pity and ends up being disillusioned and sad, maybe he tries to bury it, put distance between him and the issue and not deal with his emotions and it follows him, dogs him keeps him awake at night. How long must I wrestle and find myself in cul de sacs, dead ends, in negativity and frustration. He has no peace. Is that you?

David has a problem with others. He is defeated, they are overpowering, too strong, victorious, the person or situation wins.

The question, "How long O lord?" is repeated four times suggesting he is in danger of wearing out, he has come to the end of his resources, he has exhausted all possibilities and he is still in great difficulty. We hear the angst or pathos of David in this situation, when he describes the reality of his situation in v2b as *"and everyday have sorrow in my heart"*.

If you are aware, as the Psalmist has been speaking, that he has been addressing you, then know this the Bible understands because God understands. It is OK then to express these thoughts to God to ask the questions. God knows and it is helpful to honestly express the reality of our hearts and minds to him. Note that David shares his thoughts with the director of music and with the whole church. They hear his struggle, they sing his questions, they join with him. What a challenge it is to share with others so that they can pray for us and practically help us. IN the garden of Gethsemane Jesus sought the support of some of the disciples in prayer when he faced the reality of his own death on the cross. We are instructed to *"bear one another's burdens"* (Galatians 6:2). The prayerful and practical support of the family of God when we face a crisis is invaluable. Be honest with God and share with appropriate others in the church.

II. Direction of faith (v.3-4)

One of the tests a doctor carries out is the patella tendon reflex test. Using a small hammer the tendon below the knee is tapped and if the nerve pathway is intact to the spine then your leg will move, proving the integrity of the L3-4 pathway. You cannot help it and it is a good thing.

Assuming that David means everything, he has said in v1-2 and it accurately reflects how he is feeling and thinking, why on earth does he persist in coming to God. Why look to God at all? It surely does not make sense, there is no logic to it. Like the knee jerk it is instinctive of those of faith that they ask God to look on them, to have a relationship with them, to engage, to see, to speak personally with him. This is the direction faith moves; towards God, it may not make much sense at the time, but believers persist and relate to God, it is the instinct of faith. Though it may logically not make sense, that is not to say that we are unthinking, and David comes to God with rational specific requests which he outlines in v.3b-4.

"Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death". The request of David that God would give "light to his eyes" intrigued me. As most people know, your eyes tell a lot about your state of health. His eyes are dim, what does that mean? The bible uses the idea to speak of grief (Job 17:7) the experience of ill health, tears and death. Conversely eyes that are bright signify health and vitality (Deut 34:7). The situation he faces is as we might say is, "killing him" so it could be a metaphor for difficulties, crises one or many or as some commentators believe David could be speaking of personal ill health or death. Lord heal me, or I will die. I need you to give me life. It is a strong, urgent and vital request.

Then he adds two further consequences of God failing to answer. My enemy will say, *"I have overcome him"*, I will be defeated, and presumably that means God and his honour will suffer. *"My foes will rejoice when I fall"*. Note the plural foes, they will triumph and gloat. And presumably that means they will rejoice over the demise of God's servant. Dale Ralph Davis makes the point that the prayer of faith encompasses the emotion of v1-2 and the rational arguments of v3-4, we come to God with both, our heart and our mind.

III. Rock of faith (v.5-6)

What creates the transition from crises to confidence? How can David say x4 "how long O lord?" and then utter these words in v5-6 of absolute confidence and joy. The answer comes at the start of v5, **"But I trust"**. I am going to trust God, yes I have questions, I don't know why God has not answered my prayer, I don't know why my life has taken such a difficult direction, or why my thought life is so tortured and my emotions are so negative, or why so many people and situations are against me, BUT I TRUST. It is the same instinct of faith, and it is rooted in two realities or metaphorical rocks, the character of God and his work or action on my behalf.

But I trust in your unending love. Love is the defining characteristic of God; his love is expressed in a myriad of ways to humanity but particularly in his promises or covenants. Like the vow made in marriage the promise a husband and wife make to be loving, faithful and dutiful unto the other, until God shall separate us by death. Sadly, we don't always fulfil our promises, but God does; God's love is unending. The Hebrew word is *"hesed"*, and it is a beautiful reality, a miracle of grace, undeserved, it is a quality of loving faithfulness that is mind blowing. And because God's character is of grace and love, steady, dependable and unending, we can trust Him. It is an instinct of the believer and a conscious choice, an act of the will.

My heart rejoices in your salvation. I know the reality of your salvation. You have rescued me in the past, you have sustained me until now in the present and you will save me. Either from death now or in death because of your covenant promise ratified through the sacrifice of your son Jesus Christ. This knowledge, this truth, this experience of salvation from God gives us joy and cause for rejoicing and singing. This is not just about the present difficulty,

this is about the past reality of God's covenant love and the certainty of his future promises, "he has been good to me."

The rock of our faith is God, his character and his work, not our emotions or our present circumstances. Remind yourself of the cross and of God's undeserved love for you, who gave his only son and his life for our sin. We trust in the cross as an expression of God's love and as the work of our salvation, and we trust in the constant presence of God (even when it appears he is absent) Remember that he is with you and understands.

The words of Graham Kendrick's song came to mind.

He walked where I walked
He stood where I stand
He felt what I feel
He understands
He knows my frailty
Shared my humanity
Tempted in every way yet without sin

*God with us, so close to us,
God with us, Immanuel!*

One of a hated race
Stung by the prejudice
Suffering injustice
Yet he forgives
Wept for my wasted years
Paid for my wickedness
He died in my place
That I might live

Hebrew 5:7 *"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions, with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission."*

In all the messiness and in every crisis of life including death, God through his word in Psalm 13 encourages us to put our trust in God. *"But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord's praise, for He has been good to me."* Let us trust in the character of God his unfailing love and goodness and in his action on our behalf through his son Jesus on the cross, a work of salvation. In such goodness we can sing! Hallelujah The Lord has been good to me!

Praise: IPH 257(i) What A Friend We Have In Jesus

Prayers for Others

Announcements

Closing Hymn: IPH 118 He's Got The Whole World In His Hands

Benediction