

Sunday 31st May 2020 - Pentecost

Waiting and Trusting – Psalm 33

Talk by Laura Polaine, Prayers by Betty Friend (read by Sue Miller)

Hello and welcome to St Johns. Today we continue to bring Gods word to you, focusing on waiting and trusting in the Lord, and celebrating Pentecost. I will begin with the reading from Psalm 33, followed by a short talk. Sue will read the prayers, and I will then close with a blessing.

First, let us take a moment to gather our thoughts – to be still before God and call to mind those things we have done this week which were untrue, unkind or hurtful.

Lord Jesus, we are sorry
for all the wrong things we have done,
the wrong things we have said,
the wrong in our hearts:
please forgive us
and help us to live as you want us to.
Amen.

Reading – Psalm 33 New International Version (NIV)

- ¹ Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous;
it is fitting for the upright to praise him.
- ² Praise the Lord with the harp;
make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.
- ³ Sing to him a new song;
play skillfully, and shout for joy.
- ⁴ For the word of the Lord is right and true;
he is faithful in all he does.
- ⁵ The Lord loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of his unfailing love.
- ⁶ By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,
their starry host by the breath of his mouth.
- ⁷ He gathers the waters of the sea into jars^[a];
he puts the deep into storehouses.
- ⁸ Let all the earth fear the Lord;
let all the people of the world revere him.
- ⁹ For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.
- ¹⁰ The Lord foils the plans of the nations;
he thwarts the purposes of the peoples.

- ¹¹ But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever,
the purposes of his heart through all generations.
- ¹² Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,
the people he chose for his inheritance.
- ¹³ From heaven the Lord looks down
and sees all mankind;
- ¹⁴ from his dwelling place he watches
all who live on earth—
- ¹⁵ he who forms the hearts of all,
who considers everything they do.
- ¹⁶ No king is saved by the size of his army;
no warrior escapes by his great strength.
- ¹⁷ A horse is a vain hope for deliverance;
despite all its great strength it cannot save.
- ¹⁸ But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him,
on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,
- ¹⁹ to deliver them from death
and keep them alive in famine.
- ²⁰ We wait in hope for the Lord;
he is our help and our shield.
- ²¹ In him our hearts rejoice,
for we trust in his holy name.
- ²² May your unfailing love be with us, Lord,
even as we put our hope in you.

Talk

How are you at waiting? We wait for different types of things, there's the waiting as a child expectedly for his/her birthday, or the more mundane as an adult waiting for public transport – a bus to arrive – something I find particularly hard, I end up walking if the distance is not too far, only to watch the bus go past me! Currently, we have become quite good at the 'two metres apart' queuing for grocery shopping. And then there is the waiting for things that we dream off, or really hope for; perhaps a job promotion – a new job, or some other change in our circumstances. The question is to whom do we trust with the things that matter in our lives?

In the reading today, Psalm 33, it looks at waiting and trusting in God. The psalmist starts with celebration because of the i) Lord's righteous character, ii) his creative power, and iii) his sovereignty; all of these qualities indicating that the Lord is the only reliable foundation upon which to put our trust and hope. Later on in the Psalm is the reference to waiting on the Lord, and it is because of his character, that we can.

The psalm is essentially a hymn of praise to the Lord. It is God's character, his power and his sovereignty that is the motivation for the joyful praise of the musicians, singers and worshippers in the opening verses ¹Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; it is

fitting for the upright to praise him. ² Praise the Lord with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. ³ Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy.'

Firstly, God's character is described in verse 4 'For the word of the Lord is right and true; he is faithful in all he does.' The words *right* and *true* have links to a Hebrew word used to describe 'the upright'. God is upright and reliable, and because of this he also loves 'righteousness and justice' in the world he has created. God is trustworthy, though, not just because he is eternal or because he is committed to righteousness and justice, but foremost because he daily evidences his 'faithful care throughout the world he has made. The earth is full of the Lord's unfailing love.' The psalmist trusts God because of clear evidence of God's loving care for his people. The bible is reliable because, God does not lie, forget, change his words or leave his promises unfulfilled, he is faithful. For us, we sometimes change our minds, perhaps forget what we have said and the world in which we live is constantly changing, but we can trust the bible because it contains the words of a holy trustworthy and unchangeable God. As we read this psalm through the lens of the New Testament, we see that it was through Jesus (the word of God) that the whole world came into being. In verse 6 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.' This is clear reference to the creation narrative of Genesis 1, the Lord's *spoken* word to call things into existence and demonstrates the second point here of the amazingly powerful and creative *word* of God, and further in verse 7 'He gathers the waters of the sea into jars^[a]; he puts the deep into storehouses.' God controls the mighty oceans like water in a jar. ⁸ Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere him. ⁹ For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.'

Thirdly in verses 10-11 we see God's sovereignty and his enduring and unshakeable *purpose*. ¹⁰ The Lord foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. ¹¹ But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.' God is in control as he 'foils' the plan and 'thwarts' the purposes of his opponents. The psalmist's confidence about the future comes from looking back on the past. He reflects on what God has done through 'the word of the Lord' as in verse 6 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made'. Whilst around us we may see inconsistencies or in ourselves, God is completely trustworthy – his intentions never change. The Bible promises that whatever is good and perfect comes to us from the Creator who never changes (James 1:17).

But what if we trust in ourselves with our own plans, we have skills and our strengths? In the Psalm it references Israel - God's chosen nation. ¹² Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he chose for his inheritance.' Israel is blessed above all other nations because the righteous God has chosen Israel for a special relationship – to be their God, and it is he who will save them, not themselves. In verse 16 ¹⁶ No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. ¹⁷ A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save.' 'Warhorse' refers to military strength, but this is not enough. An example of this is the account of the

death of Ahab in 1 Kings: 22, despite joining forces with the king of Judah against their mutual enemy and despite disguising himself so that no-one would know he was king, Ahab was killed by the arrow of an archer who 'drew his bow at random'. Military might is not the basis for our hope. The key to winning our battles, according to the psalmist, is not to rely on your own strength but to put your trust in God. This goes against the grain, but at the end of the day human strength and power is not enough; there is futility in self-reliance.

Rather, God gives victory to those who trust in him: in the message version of verses 18-22 it says 'Watch this: God's eye is on those who respect him, the ones who are looking for his love. He's ready to come to their rescue in bad times, in lean times he keeps body and soul together.' We're depending on God, he's everything we need. As Nigel shared in a recent reflection on these verses –

"The amazing truth of waiting for the Lord, [is that] it takes us to a place where we can leave our fears, our thoughts, our concerns, anything, and it allows us space and time in worship, giving him the glory, the praise and the love, and with all his all seeing eye watching over us, supplying our every need. [Vs 18] "The eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him 'on those whose hope is in his unfailing love.'" The closer we come to the Lord, the closer he comes to us. As we wait for the Lord, we have hope and as we hope in him, whatever state we are in, so his boundless love fills us."

In these times of coronavirus it is very difficult; we know God never promised things like this would not happen, these challenges are real, and situations may seem quite hopeless, but there is always one hope, God is still watching over us, he see the danger, with tender love. In verse 20 ²⁰'We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield.' 'Help' being a term often used in the Psalms to describe God's role as protector of those in trouble.

Israel had to learn time and time again that deliverance belongs to God and salvation comes to those who 'wait hopefully' for God rather than those who trust in any form of human power. In Exodus, in the dividing of the sea, Moses saw the people were afraid and said 'The Lord will fight for you, you need only to be still.' (14:13-14),- with hopeful waiting and faithful endurance. Joshua and his followers had to walk seven times around the seemingly impregnable fortress of Jericho before the walls came tumbling down - such waiting is a sign of surrender to the power of God rather than trusting in our human strength and power. Despite suffering, struggle and pain God remains worthy of trust and is the only one source of hope. In Hebrews 13:5 God says: 'I will never fail you, I will never abandon you.' At the end of the Psalm it comes back to rejoicing, despite the challenging situation, and probably because of the situation. ²¹In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. ²²May your unfailing love be with us, Lord, even as we put our hope in you.' Nicky Gumbel referenced: Until God opens the door praise him in the hallway.

God is watching over us, but it is not from a distance. Sometimes, God may seem far away, but he is always with us through the power of the Holy Spirit; who is the comforter, the helper, and the advocate. Today we celebrate Pentecost the fulfillment of Christ's Promise in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Some of us will have had the opportunity this week to colour in the dove/flame templates Sue sent us, being symbols of the Holy Spirit symbolizing speech and the communication of the Good News.

Acts 2:1-4 '2 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues^[a] as the Spirit enabled them.'

As Christians we have received the Holy Spirit, and when we experience the Holy Spirit we are experiencing God's love for us. In Romans 5:5 it says: 'God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.' In our Vision we have said we will build our community, (not in our own strength), but with the Holy Spirit. Whilst we are not able to meet in the church building we have found other ways to connect with each other through emails, phone calls, Alpha online, Zoom Sunday services, Zoom/WhatsApp Home Groups, Zoom Parish prayers, Zoom quiz nights, and there may be ways we have not yet thought of how we can continue to be and grow as Church during this time of lockdown.

Wherever there is an experience of the Holy Spirit, and is in itself evidence of the resurrection, he brings a new fire and passion to our lives. Our hearts are filled with joy and this joy expresses itself in praise to God. This expression of joy demonstrates the personal nature of the Spirit in our lives, the reality of the living God, that is breathing, living in us, and energizing us as individuals, and thus encouraging us to encourage others to experience the same joy. It's the nature of what the Spirit does- and it's for us to be open to it.

The disciples whilst they were waiting for the Holy Spirit to come may have wondered if they were up for the task of spreading the Good news and a few thoughts, that Peter may have had are in a meditation by - Nick Fawcett,

"We were waiting its true....we wanted to carry on his [Jesus] work, don't get me wrong, we wanted to tell them what happened, help them find faith for themselves, but how could we even hope to begin? So we kept the doors locked and sang our hymns and said our prayers and hid our doubts.'

And then when the Holy Spirit came this all changed for them:

'It was as though a mighty wind blew away the cobwebs, a refreshing breeze revived our flagging faith, a breath of air stirred our spirits, as though a tiny spark rekindled our

confidence, a tongue of fire set our hearts aflame, a raging inferno swept our fears away. As though life had begun again, the world become a different place, and each of us born anew.”

And likewise, we are also empowered by the Holy Spirit to share the Good news, in a hurting world. Thomas Kelly wrote:

‘God plucks the world out of our hearts, loosening the chains of attachment. And He hurls the world into our hearts where we and He together carry it in infinitely tender love’

Let us pray:

Lord, thank you that you love us with an unconditional love, we don’t have to earn it instead we receive your love by grace through faith. Help us to trust in you with our concerns and hopes, to wait for your timing, and to lean not on our own understanding. We pray fill us afresh with your Holy Spirit to love others, because you first loved us. Amen

Prayers

Holy Spirit you are welcome here, come flood this place and change the atmosphere. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we come to you today on this Pentecost Sunday to give you thanks and praise for the gift of your Holy Spirit as our Helper, comforter and guide. We bring our prayers to you, confident that you hear and answer them.

At this difficult time of uncertainty, we need the assurance of your love and your promise that you will never leave us or forsake us, and we claim that promise as your people.

We pray for our world at a time when covid 19 has infected almost every country. We pray for Betty’s friends in Eswatini where health care is basic, and children are going hungry as the schools are closed. We thank you that the African Village School fund has been able to send money to help the children and elderly in our community in Ekudzeni. Let us have a short time to pray for those we know who are in great need known to us. We also lift to you those who are suffering as a result of violence, adverse weather conditions, lack of clean water and famine as a result of the plague of locusts affecting parts of the Middle East and East Africa. We pray for the peace of Jerusalem. We ask your protection and comfort on our persecuted brothers and sisters suffering because of holding onto their faith in you.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for missionaries and aid workers seeking to bring relief and the gospel of hope in many places in the world, thinking especially of the Day family in Thailand, Victoria who has been working in China, and thanking you for Jenny, at present in Scotland.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for our nation, for the members of the national parliament, the devolved and local officials. Give them wisdom and integrity as they wrestle with the many problems confronting them, and may their decisions be in accordance with your will. We thank you for the commitment of key workers, hospital staff, emergency services, utility and council workers and those working in the food industries. For those using their skills to produce protective equipment both at home and in factories that, at present, cannot follow their own trades.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for our community that they will be obedient to the rules of social distancing and that, when using parks and open spaces, they will not leave them strewn with rubbish which may cause harm to other users. Lord please keep the streets of Penge safe from violence and theft. We ask your blessing on Christian communities in this area, as they seek to continue to bring your word to the people.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Finally, we ask your blessing on our church family here at St John's. We thank you for our wardens Steve and Ian, largely doing their work unseen, for Sue doing the administration work, for Andrew seeing to the finances and for the home group leaders keeping the groups engaged and keeping in touch with those who are isolated. Thank you for Rachel and Lin as they keep the CAP centre running, bless their work, and those that they are working to help. Thank you that the food bank is keeping up with need. We pray for our brothers and sisters who are sick, grieving or lonely at this time, thinking especially of Val and Yvette. Thank you that Anthony is making a slow recovery. Let us take a moment to remember those known to each of us who are in need of our prayers.

Lord we ask for your hand of protection on our families, friends and St John's family. At this time of difficulty, draw us all near to you, and we ask that your Holy Spirit will touch each one of us.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We will now say together the prayer that Jesus taught us:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

Almighty Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Final Blessing

May the grace of God uphold you,
the peace of God surround you,
the love of God flow from you
and the strength of God protect
and bring you safely through this day.
Amen