

Sermon – Lent 1

Genesis 9:8-17, 3:1-7, Mark 1:9-15, Psalm 25.1-10

In you, O Lord my God, have I put my hope: in you have I trusted. **Amen.**

Well it's certainly been a week in which we have had to trust God! On Tuesday I was wondering if our pancake evening would go ahead. In the morning we received news of a total fire ban, then we had a 40 degree day followed by a mini tornado which ripped through the area and took out most of the power, knocking down trees all over the place including the gum tree outside of the back of the Op Shop, causing it to embed one of its branches through the wall and into the Op Shop! The unflappable Garry over in Little River calmly brought out his generators and moved the pancake bbqs into the back shed. The storm broke the heat and the evening was a very pleasant one in the mid 20s with about 100 people coming out to enjoy pancakes with delicious toppings in the beautiful grounds of Christ Church. God is good!

Mind you, the saga with the gum tree in the Op Shop continues. The SES advised that it was too complex a job for them on Thursday and so we engaged an arborist to make the place safe on Saturday. Next job will be to get the damage assessed and see whether it goes beyond the \$5000 insurance excess the Diocese imposes on us!

As I mulled over all these events, it seemed to me to be a great metaphor for life and in many ways a great metaphor for the Lenten journey that we are all embarking on this week. Lent: it's traditionally a time of prayer, fasting and reflection, a time of study and growing closer to God. It's also often painted as a time of penitence, a time of giving up things, perhaps even a gloomy time. But I prefer to see Lent as a time when we actively seek God, whether by prayer, meditation or study. It's a time when our spiritual lives can blossom under the vision of new life that God presents to us at Easter, in the resurrection of Jesus. So today I want to meditate on our psalm, Psalm 25,

because it brings into play all these Lenten motifs and ask the question, how are you going to use your time, this Lent?

Psalm 25 is quite unusual in that it is an acrostic psalm in Hebrew! I think there are 4-5 acrostic psalms. We can't tell in the English translations, but in Hebrew, the language in which it was originally written, the first letter of the first word of each verse is the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. I can't tell you that because I've read it in Hebrew, but because I've read multiple commentaries that all make note of it! This style of writing, more common in the post exilic period, also gives away its date of composition. Some of the psalms are very ancient so it's interesting to note that the book of Psalms was being edited over a period of many 100s of years, perhaps not unexpected when you consider it to be a collection of hymns and prayers. When I consider the writings of scripture, both old testament and new testament, I am so often in awe at the beauty, the cleverness, the symbolism and the literary genius in so much of the structure within the various books. Truly scripture is the word of God.

And so to our Psalm today which is a general prayer, useful for many situations, and opens with:

In you, O Lord my God, have I put my hope: in you have I trusted, let me not be ashamed, nor let my enemies triumph over me.

And the psalmist goes on to say:

Lead me in the ways of your truth, and teach me: for you are the God of my salvation.

In you O Lord have I put my hope: in you have I trusted. Lead me in the ways of your truth for you are the God of my salvation. Hope, trust, truth, salvation. What a beautiful group of words! They express all of our human longing and reflect our human frailty. Our longing for truth and salvation and the frailty of our hope and trust.

As I cast my mind back on the week that we have had, I see that I, probably like many of you, tend to view my life in a very granular way. Moments tend to be dominated by the immediacy of the events happening around us. This can be as simple as struggling through a 40 degree day or watching the debris flying around as the change came through mid afternoon Tuesday, with a violent storm. These weather events I think remind us that we are not in control! So often we fall into the trap of thinking that yes, I do control my life and what happens around me. So often we fall into the trap of assuming that power belonging to God. And as we work out in our own power, how often are we then disappointed, perhaps by ourselves or perhaps by the people around us? How often do we let our hope and our trust fall away?

Yes, it's been an instructive week. As I looked at the weather app on Tuesday morning and read the news of a total fire ban, I wondered if this was going to be the first Pancake night that was cancelled! And I texted Garry to check in, and he assured me that all was going ahead. And as it turned out, we were indeed powerless after the mini-tornado, but pancakes went ahead. We had around 100 people turn up, and a beautiful community atmosphere filled the Christ Church grounds. God gave us a beautiful evening, a friendly community and showed us compassion and loving kindness. I received a text this week from Gina who won the box of vegetables. Not only did she mention that the food was, and I quote, a "Godsend" she also committed to playing at our Easter Vigil service. In you, O Lord my God, have I put my hope: in you have I trusted.

And the psalm is not just a description of our own longing and frailty, it's also a description of God's qualities, if that's possible! But the psalmist goes on to assure us that God is a God of love, mercy and faithfulness. Our God is a God of covenant, a God of promises, a God who is in relationship with us, if we want it, if we trust. And this is our hope. This is what restores us when we are worn out, defeated by the daily grind, or by the slings and arrows of the world around us.

That God, who loves us as we are, who is a God of mercy and forgiveness when inevitably we do transgress, and are not kind to each other, the God who guides and teaches us in the paths that are just and true, this is the God that restores us to fullness of life. When we ask, we can find restoration in our relationship with God. The psalmist goes on:

Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: but according to your mercy think on me.

Good and upright is the Lord: therefore will he direct sinners in the way.

Yes, God is merciful, but this means that we have to make time in our overcommitted lives to find God, to listen to God. For God will lead us if we listen, if we hear. And this is what I love about Lent. Every year, I find that it is great opportunity to reboot my spiritual disciplines, to spend that time with God, to pray that the plans that I endlessly make are indeed the plans that God has for me. For,

The meek he will guide in the path of justice: and teach the humble his ways.

All the paths of the Lord are faithful and true: for those who keep his covenant and his commandments.

How will you spend time with Jesus this Lent? Will you allow yourself to spend some time in the wilderness, trusting that the angels will be there and God's presence is never far away?

Take some time now to write down your plans for Lent on the blank pages in your pew bulletin.

Let us pray:

Loving and Gracious God, as we journey through Lent, grappling with your word, trying to understand your will for each and every one of us, send your Spirit to lead us, so that we can live in this world as you would want us to, with generosity, love and kindness, and always trusting in you and your salvation. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.