

**Sermon – 1Corinthians10: 1-13,
Ps 63, Luke 13:31-35, Isaiah 55:1-9**

O God, you are my God, eagerly will I seek you, my soul thirsts for you;
My soul clings to you, and your right hand upholds me.

On Tuesday, Leon and I had our date day and went to see a movie. What do two ministers do when they go to the movies? See a movie about another minister of course! We seem to be attracted to movies about famous Christians. A few months ago we saw the movie *The Hopeful* about Ellen White, a 19th century prophet who was instrumental in the founding of the 7th Day Adventist Church. Last week we saw *Conclave*, a fictional movie about the secret process of selecting the Pope. This week we watched *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Spy, Assassin*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer lived from 1906-1945 and was a German pastor, theologian and peace activist. He wrote profoundly about Christian faith, community, grace, and ethics, centered in one way or another on the question, who is Christ for us today? The atrocities of the Nazi Regime compelled him to participate in a conspiracy that tried unsuccessfully to assassinate Hitler. Imprisoned during the last two years of his life, Bonhoeffer was executed just weeks before the end of the war.

Our psalm today has been called a confession of trust. In beautiful metaphorical language, the psalmist calls out his desire for God and his absolute trust in God's faithfulness. And this attribute of trust is fully displayed in the character of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was depicted as a passionate, prayerful follower of Jesus, right up to the end of his life which was brutally cut short by hanging. Reading the psalm, as I have done this week, was a relief, as it provided me with a contrast to our other scripture which seemed to match the temper of our times – angry, confusing and despairing. Perhaps this jolting of our collective psyche is appropriate for the Lenten period when we more seriously contemplate the meaning of Christ's journey to the cross. And the readings do challenge us to examine ourselves.

As I meditated more on the psalm, I found that there were connections across all of our readings today. The imagery used in the psalm is found in the Old Testament reading. But more important, the description of a faithful God of steadfast love comes out across all the readings. And it is this steadfast nature of God, a God of enduring love, that we must hold on to, during unsettled times. Let's look at the readings a little closer.

Our Psalm today begins with:

O God, you are my God, eagerly will I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh longs for you, as a dry and weary land where no water is.

Here the psalmist is declaring his aching yearning for God. How many of us also thirst for God? And the image of a dry and weary land where there is no water is very familiar to us here in Australia. Our farmers regularly experience drought or fire and these have been headlines in recent times. Even here in Lara and Little River we have been starved of rain until this week, but even these recent falls are probably not enough. What keeps us going in tough times?

As people of faith, times of uncertainty or even crisis, often focus us on the transcendent, on our God, and the psalmist goes on:

And so it was when I beheld you in the sanctuary, and saw your power and glory.

The psalmist is in the temple, in church! He comes to worship God in all his power and glory, just as we do today. We come here, hoping, even expecting, to feel the presence of God, a God who is present and active in our world and our lives. As we sang in one of our opening hymns, "I will behold the majesty of God, the risen Prince of peace, the Son of righteousness." And why do we worship this God? The psalmist says:

For your unchanging goodness is better than life, therefore my lips shall praise you.

We come to church to praise God and to be fed by God's steadfast love, to bask in God's grace and forgiveness, to relish God's unchanging goodness. But who is this God that we worship? God the mighty creator in whose image

we too were created, Jesus, God's only begotten son who died on the cross for each one of us, and the Holy Spirit who sustains us and is always with us in times of trouble and challenge, in times of joy and gladness. It is this God, three in one, that the psalmist proclaims:

And so I will bless you as long as I live; and in your name will I lift my hands on high.

Yes, because of this love, this grace, we will lift up our hands, the motion of prayer and praise and call your name as long as we live. Some of you will know that one of my favourite hymns is "Lord I lift your name on high, Lord I love to sing your praises. I'm so glad you're in my life, I'm so glad you came to save us." The psalmist continues:

My longing shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, my mouth shall praise you with exultant lips.

And these metaphors of a thirsty people being satisfied by a rich feast are also used in our reading from Isaiah today. The prophet says:

"everyone who thirsts, come to the waters" and then "eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live".

This idea that God provides us with what we need, and then something more, something special for our souls, something that we long for, something that makes us live, really live, this idea is steeped in both these Old Testament readings. And if we remember to our sermon on Lent 1 just two weeks ago, we would recall that Jesus said when he was out in the wilderness, "One does not live on bread alone." We are spiritual people, people designed to be in relationship with each other and with God. The psalmist goes on:

When I remember you upon my bed, when I meditate upon you in the night watches;

The psalmist is saying that our relationship with God is not just something that manifests itself in public worship. It's something that is nurtured and developed by our own private prayer - in our own quiet space, we can seek the Lord. How many of you take the time to pray to our Lord? To carve out

some time in our busy days to seek his guidance, and to be confirmed in his love and grace?

How you have been my helper, then I sing for joy in the shadow of your wings.

And here the psalmist is joyful because of God's love and the metaphor used is "in the shadow of your wings". As a bookend to chapter 13, which we heard last week, Jesus also uses this metaphor when he is lamenting over Jerusalem and says:

How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

Here, Jesus is also showing God's steadfast love using the mothering metaphor of a hen gathering her chicks under her wing. God's steadfast love despite the intransigence and hard heartedness of the people in Jerusalem. And we, are we also hard hearted? How are we responding to Jesus' call to repent and believe? Are we singing for joy like the psalmist, or are we somewhat unwilling like the people of Jerusalem?

And the final line of the psalm is:

Then my soul clings to you; and your right hand upholds me.

Our longing for God is matched by God's strength. God will uphold us, when we trust and have faith. And isn't this what Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians in verse 13?

God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

God is faithful. We can rely implicitly on God. Perhaps we feel that our own personal or communal trials are too great and beyond the ability of anyone to alleviate. And in his usual directness Paul says at the beginning of this verse no trial has overtaken you that is not common to everyone.

But more importantly, God has been along this path of trial and tribulation in Jesus. God knows what we can endure. God knows the way through the valley, and the way out, and the way of endurance and the day of release because all of these, God has experienced.

So, as I have been meditating this week, still somewhat disturbed by recent global events, I cling to this image of a God who is faithful, who has unchanging goodness, who will provide a banquet for the soul and is a source of loving protection. And I will continue to worship God together with you in church and I will also pray and meditate in my own quiet time, asking God to fill my soul, to quench my thirst, and the thirst of the people around me. How will you nurture your relationship with God? Will you be willing to spend some time with Jesus this Lenten period?