

Worship at Home 04.10.20

Call to worship

O give thanks to the Lord our God, for he is good; His steadfast love endures forever! Psalm 118:1

Singing the Faith 353 Jesus is Lord

- 1 Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it,
for by his power each tree and flower was planned and made.
Jesus is Lord! The universe declares it;
sun, moon and stars in heaven cry: Jesus is Lord!
Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord!
Praise him with alleluias, for Jesus is Lord!
- 2 Jesus is Lord! Yet from his throne eternal
in flesh he came to die in pain on Calvary's tree.
Jesus is Lord! From him all life proceeding —
yet gave his life a ransom, thus setting us free.
- 3 Jesus is Lord! O'er sin the mighty conqueror,
from death he rose; and all his foes shall own his name.
Jesus is Lord! God sends his Holy Spirit
to show by works of power that Jesus is Lord.

David John Mansell (b. 1936) Words and Music: © 1980 Springtide

Prayer of adoration and confession

God of beauty and power, wonder and light, we worship you for being who you are:
More beautiful than the sunlight you made; stronger than the power that formed the universe.
Brighter than the light which banishes night;
more wonderful than butterfly wings, snowflake's fall, or rising dew. We worship you in adoration and
praise.

But even as words of praise rise up in our hearts and pass our lips we know that we have not always lived
as those who are loved, forgiven and set free. We have allowed ourselves to be imprisoned by tradition,
captivated by habit, limited by fear. Through the healing power of love made flesh, make us whole, to live
and love with open hearts and generous spirits. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who came to show us the
way and bring us close to you. Amen

Matthew 21:33-46 (other readings Isaiah 5:1-7, Psalm 118)

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: ³³Listen to another parable. There was a
landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watch-tower.
Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. ³⁴When the harvest time had come, he sent his
slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. ³⁵But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another,
and stoned another. ³⁶Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same
way. ³⁷Finally he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." ³⁸But when the tenants saw the
son, they said to themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance." ³⁹So they
seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. ⁴⁰Now when the owner of the vineyard comes,
what will he do to those tenants?' ⁴¹They said to him, 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and
lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.'

⁴²Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures:

"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord's doing,

and it is amazing in our eyes”?

⁴³Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. ⁴⁴The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.’

⁴⁵When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. ⁴⁶They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

Reflection

There are a number of parables that Jesus tells that are really hard to understand and this, for me, is one of them.

It is fairly clear that it foretells the way that Jesus, the Son of God, is going to be treated by religious and secular leaders. But, alongside that it is a warning for the leaders themselves, inviting them to look at their own behaviour and intentions. My struggle over the past few days has been to find the Good News for us and its relevance for the time in which we live.

Perhaps my problem has been that I got stuck in the story (we so often get stuck in the story, focussing more on the chaos that is around, and forgetting to look beyond). The thing that enabled the leaders to see what lay behind and beyond the parable is at the very end of the passage where Jesus quotes from Psalm 118:22-24 *The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

I am writing this on Wednesday 23rd September the day after the Prime Minister announced new measures to help curb the spread of Covid- 19. These new restrictions have led me, and I suspect many others, into a state of gloom. There seems to be no end to it all. Like the parable for today it’s not a good story. Where is God in all of this? What does the future hold? Where is the Good News?

The Psalm that Jesus links with his story about wicked tenants is a psalm that begins *‘O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his steadfast love endures forever!’* Although it begins on a very positive note, it is not a psalm about everything in life being wonderful, the psalmist goes on to say *‘out of my distress I called on the Lord’ (Ps 118:5)*. I wonder how long it was before he experienced God’s answer to his plea.

It seems, at first, as if God answers the psalmist straight away for the next sentence says *‘the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place’* or *‘the Lord answered me and set me free’*. I like both versions, the first reminds of standing on Dartmoor and seeing the view for miles around, the second allows me to imagine running up and down the hills, leaping and waving arms aloft, full of joy.

Even if the psalmist did experience an immediate response to his prayer it would seem that he had to continue living through a challenging time. He was able to do that because he held on to the truth *‘The Lord is with me, I will not be afraid; what can anyone do to me?’ Ps 118:6*. As the psalm continues there is much that he could be afraid of. Surrounded by strong enemies he was nearly defeated, but he says *‘The Lord helped me. The Lord is my strength and my might. He has become my salvation.’ (Ps 118:15)*.

The psalm ends in words of praise and celebration as a new day dawns. The hand of God, in all that has happened, is evident. The last two verses read *‘You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you. O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.’ (Ps 118:28-29)*

When Jesus quotes Scripture he knows the context in which the words are set. He expects his hearers to know the context as well. At a time when Jesus was coming to the end of his earthly ministry and knew that those who had responsibility for the lives of the people were failing in their duty he quoted words from a psalm that talked about the steadfast love of the Lord. He quoted words that promised God would redeem the situation, he knew that when everything seemed hopeless God was still at work.

So in answer to my earlier questions:

Where is God in all of this? He is alongside us giving us the strength to carry on.

What does the future hold? Whatever happens we are held in the steadfast love of God. Where is the Good News in this? Jesus knows what it's like to be in situations where all seems bleak. He also knows that his Father turns things around. He knows that he will always be with his people and that through him we will be able to lift our heads and hearts as we proclaim *'This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!'* (Psalm 118: 24)

Singing the Faith 152 This is the day

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| 1 | This is the day,
this is the day that the Lord has made,
that the Lord has made.
We will rejoice,
we will rejoice and be glad in it,
and be glad in it.
This is the day that the Lord has made;
we will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day,
this is the day that the Lord has made. | 2 | This is the day,
this is the day when he rose again,
when he rose again.
We will rejoice,
we will rejoice and be glad in it,
and be glad in it.
This is the day when he rose again;
we will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day,
this is the day when he rose again. |
| 3 | This is the day,
this is the day when the Spirit came,
when the Spirit came.
We will rejoice,
we will rejoice and be glad in it,
and be glad in it.
This is the day when the Spirit came;
we will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day,
this is the day when the Spirit came. | | |

Anonymous

Prayers of intercession

Ever present God, this is a day that you have made, a day where children laugh, and play and learn, and families are held together in love and security. On this day communities show their care for each other, justice and mercy flow and we feel positive about the future. For this we are filled with joy. Thank you for being there in the joyful times.

Ever present God, this is a day that you have made, a day where children cry from hunger, fear and abuse and families are torn apart by suspicion, violence and poverty. Communities are broken and individuals build barriers fearing for their own safety and not caring for the safety of others. For this we are filled with pain and sorrow. Thank you for being there in the difficult times.

Ever present God, be with those who lead us, give them wisdom and strength. Be with us as we seek to be your people in the places where we live. In Jesus name we pray.

Lord's prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Time of Offering

At this point in the service please bring what you offer before God asking God to bless all that you give and for it to be used for the kingdom.

Singing the Faith 509 Safe in the shadow of the Lord

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| 1 | Safe in the shadow of the Lord
beneath his hand and power,
I trust in him,
I trust in him,
my fortress and my tower. | 2 | My hope is set on God alone
though Satan spreads his snare;
I trust in him,
I trust in him,
to keep me in his care. |
| 3 | From fears and phantoms of the night,
from foes about my way,
I trust in him,
I trust in him,
by darkness as by day. | 4 | His holy angels keep my feet
secure from every stone;
I trust in him,
I trust in him,
and unafraid go on. |
| 5 | Strong in the everlasting name,
and in my Father's care,
I trust in him,
I trust in him,
who hears and answers prayer. | 6 | Safe in the shadow of the Lord,
possessed by love divine,
I trust in him,
I trust in him,
and meet his love with mine. |

Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926) Based on Psalm 91 Words: © Timothy Dudley-Smith in Europe and Africa;

Final prayer and blessing

This is the day the Lord has made.
I will rejoice and be glad in it.
Bless me as I rest in your presence,
be with those I love,
and those I am called to love
this day and always. Amen