

Reflection on Psalm 34 Rev'd Kyla Sorensen

This week, apart from Wild Church on Wednesday, we have been looking at some of the psalms, thinking about how these poems and songs have spoken to billions of people across the world for thousands of years, and how they speak to us in our time, right now, amidst the Covid-19 crisis.

We have reflected on how in psalm 42 the deer pants for water so we are all thirsty for God, how from the words in psalm 139 we know that God searches us and knows us better than we know ourselves. We heard in the verses of psalm 118 the promise of God's *hesed*, his mercy and steadfast love for us, and yesterday we briefly explored our desire to praise and worship God for his loving kindness.

Throughout the week we have held our over-arching theme in our hearts, taken from psalm 34 v6, as we have been praying with and reflecting on the psalms in this series: "This poor soul cried, and the Lord heard me, and saved me from all my troubles" And today we are going to look at Psalm 34 in its entirety.

First let us sing a hymn of God's faithfulness to us.

*Great is Thy faithfulness
O God my Father
There is no shadow of turning with Thee
Thou changest not
Thy compassions they fail not
As Thou hast been
Thou forever will be*

*Great is Thy faithfulness
Great is Thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see
And all I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness
Lord unto me*

*Pardon for sin
And a peace that endureth
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide
Strength for today
and bright hope for tomorrow
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside*

*Great is Thy faithfulness
Great is Thy faithfulness
Lord every morning new mercies I see
And all I have needed Thy hands hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness
Lord unto me*

Psalm 34

- 1 I will bless the Lord at all times;
his praise shall ever be in my mouth.
- 2 My soul shall glory in the Lord;
let the humble hear and be glad.
- 3 O magnify the Lord with me;
let us exalt his name together.
- 4 I sought the Lord and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.
- 5 Look upon him and be radiant
and your faces shall not be ashamed.
- 6 This poor soul cried, and the Lord heard me
and saved me from all my troubles.
- 7 The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him
and delivers them.
- 8 O taste and see that the Lord is gracious;
blessed is the one who trusts in him.
- 9 Fear the Lord, all you his holy ones,
for those who fear him lack nothing.
- 10 Lions may lack and suffer hunger,
but those who seek the Lord
lack nothing that is good.
- 11 Come, my children, and listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.
- 12 Who is there who delights in life
and longs for days to enjoy good things?
- 13 Keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from lying words.
- 14 Turn from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.
- 15 The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous
and his ears are open to their cry.
- 16 The face of the Lord is against those who do evil,
to root out the remembrance of them from the earth.
- 17 The righteous cry and the Lord hears them
and delivers them out of all their troubles.
- 18 The Lord is near to the brokenhearted
and will save those who are crushed in spirit.
- 19 Many are the troubles of the righteous;
from them all will the Lord deliver them.

- 20 He keeps all their bones,
so that not one of them is broken.
21 But evil shall slay the wicked
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
22 The Lord ransoms the life of his servants
and will condemn none who seek refuge in him.

All week we have been thinking about how the psalms can be helpful tools for us to look at our own relationship with God, how they reflect back to us something of our human emotion within that relationship. There can be sometimes a sense of relief when we see echoes of our own confusion, anger or fears, and today we will think about how this psalm brings blessing as well as thanksgiving.

It begins with an appeal, an open invitation for us the reader (or the one who hears it if it sung) to join the psalmist in worship and praise, in standing in the awesome wonder of God and to receive the healing from God that the psalmist himself/ herself has received. It is a joyous call, earnest and from the soul. The invitation to seek the face of God and let go of all the shame and fear. In verse 6 we hear the promise that we have been holding in our hearts all week, the promise that God hears us when we cry out. That healing will come. That we are loved by him. We can trust in the psalmist's words, they are a great witness to us. What of your own emotion can you hear in those words v6?

"This poor soul cried, and the Lord heard me, and saved me from all my troubles"

What emotion of the community or the country as a collective, can you sense in that verse?

This psalm is a blessing because within its verses we are given the promise that life lived in fear of the Lord is one that will bring us fulfilment.

This song is passionate, personal and yet it is a song for everyone. We can know by the psalmist's passionate witness to us that, like him or her, we are not left alone, crying out to God, we see in v7 that he sends angels to be with us, to watch over us and protect us. "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them." This is not the disinterest of a distant God, but the action of a caring, loving God who loves us.

Think about who those angels may be for you at this time.

Perhaps they are those who have offered help to you during lockdown, perhaps they are in the shape of someone you hadn't heard from in a while who suddenly called to reconnect. Perhaps it is in the smile of the person in front of you in the queue outside Tesco. It could be a small bird resting a while on your windowsill just as you are looking out...

The call to fear God is not about "fear" but instead about standing before God is awesome wonder, in orienting our lives towards God in everything we do, and with

everything that we are. We are encouraged to turn our faces to God and we will in return receive his blessings.

We are called to be passionate looking to God, seeking God, crying out to God, finding refuge in God, praising and exalting God's name because that is what people who live in fear of the Lord do!

This doesn't mean that we are spared suffering, but that God is with us in every part of life, in the joys and so also in our suffering. We are assured that he will hear our prayers and our final deliverance is sure.

In perhaps the best-known line of the text he sings out, "O taste and see that the LORD is good" (v. 8). We can choose to jump in – to experience God with every sense, with all of who we are – as in verse 14 of psalm 139: "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

I encourage you to spend some time with this psalm today – remembering God's loving kindness and care towards you, resting in his loving gaze, feeling the strength of his mercy and steadfast love surrounding you. Bring before God your whole self, knowing that whatever your petition, he will hear you.

Let the love of God into your life this day.
And let his love shine out from you towards others.

As community we are apart but we come together in Christ, so pray for our community today, in the same way that you pray for yourself, confident in what God can deliver, how his faithfulness can and will hold all of us as individuals and as a community in his unfailing love.

Great is his faithfulness.