

**SERMON – 20/9/20**  
**'Water from the Rock'**

Psalm 105:1-6 and 37-45

Romans 11:33-36

“Be glad that we belong to God; let all who worship the Lord rejoice. Go to the Lord for help; and worship God continually.” (Psalm 105:3-4)

Every good sermon should start where people are. So where are you today? If I were a betting man, which of course I am not, I would wager a fair amount on the likelihood that many of you listening this morning are at a low ebb just now. If my conversations with some of you and contact I have had with others among you in recent days are anything to go by, a gloom has descended in the last week or two which is quite widespread. From the early days of the pandemic there was an expectation and an acceptance that drastic action had to be taken – lockdown – in order to protect lives and prevent coronavirus from devastating our community and our nation. Overnight, social interaction ground to a halt and while those were difficult days, particularly as the death toll spiralled and the health service felt the strain, most people were fortunate to have been able to enjoy the spring sunshine and the fresh air. I for one thought that we would probably be getting back to some sort of normality by this point in the year and while many people are certainly able to do much more than they were in April and May and June, the strain is beginning to show in different ways. For some, there is unwelcome pressure to go back amongst people, perhaps to work, and a deep sense of anxiety alongside it, while for others there is an equally unwelcome pressure to stay away from people and an oppressive sense of imprisonment as a result.

Actually almost everyone feels that they are getting a raw deal and that others are having it easy whereas in reality it is hard for everybody and the prospect is not of spring and summer to come but of the dark and cold, a landscape where in the memorable words of CS Lewis it is 'always winter but never Christmas.'

So am I right? Do I win the bet that I wouldn't place? Are you and others you know at a low ebb just now? Well, that's where the sermon has to start, where many of us are, feeling down and anxious about how things are

going to turn out and when. But while the sermon needs to start there, it quickly needs to move on or we will simply wallow unhelpfully together in our shared misery and sink still lower in our spirits. That's not what I am here to do for you this morning.

A song came into my mind the other day that I honestly don't think I have given a thought to since my youth. In 1979, Ian Dury and the Blockheads went to No.3 in the UK charts with 'Reasons to be Cheerful (Part 3)'. Do you remember it? Maybe it will only be my generation who recall it. It was a strange song – just a list of things that in Ian Dury's estimation made it worthwhile not just going back to bed.

Reasons to be cheerful, part 3  
 Summer, Buddy Holly, the working folly  
 Good golly, Miss Molly and boats  
 Hammersmith Palais, the Bolshoi Ballet  
 Jump back in the alley and nanny goats  
 The juice of a carrot, the smile of a parrot  
 A little drop of claret, anything that rocks  
 Reasons to be cheerful (part 1,2,3)

Apparently, I discovered, it was written while the band was on tour in Italy. One of the crew was nearly electrocuted on stage and as a result of safety fears, the Italian authorities simply cancelled the rest of the tour. However, while things were bad for the band as a result, they could have been much worse – nobody had died. There were reasons to be cheerful – hence the song.

And in a way, the psalm we read from this morning makes a similar point – despite the dark days of slavery in Egypt, the people of Israel had reasons to be cheerful. And so, my friends, do we – no matter how much we may each be struggling in these days we have something to sing about.

Let me highlight what I think are three reasons to be more than cheerful – rather, three reasons to give thanks to the Lord, which should be at the heart not only of the worship we offer in our Sunday morning gatherings but of the worship that is expressed in the way we live and move and have our being every day and every moment of our lives.

“Give thanks to the Lord, says the psalmist and proclaim God's greatness. Tell the nations what God has done.” (v.1) The first reason to be cheerful

is that God is great – there is cause for rejoicing in the very nature and Person of God. At the beginning of the service this morning I read from the Book of Lamentations, “Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for God's compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness, O Lord.” God's love and mercy and faithfulness are unchanging and yet ever new. Every morning with the rising of the sun we have reason to rejoice that God is good, and so as we find ourselves in these days at a low ebb, I want to encourage you to lift your eyes above the horizons that perhaps seem to be closing in on us at the moment and fix your gaze on Jesus. There is one reason to be cheerful even if everything else may seem grim – Jesus is Lord and has overcome the world in its brokenness.

But there is a second reason. The psalmist writes, “Tell the nations what God has done. Sing praise to the Lord; tell of the wonderful things He has done.” (vv.1-2) Over these September Sundays we are marking Creation Time and focussing on the environment – and what cause that gives us to declare the wonders that the Creator has done. These recent days of sunshine have cheered our hearts and even as the sun goes down at night and darkness descends, the splendour of the colours that adorn the sky give us cause to rejoice. At this harvest season it does us good to marvel at the brambles in the hedgerows and the apples on the trees and the tatties in the ground – what wonderful things our Creator has done. Doesn't that cheer your heart? And Jesus, the Son of God, has done still greater wonders in winning salvation for us and victory over death, and the blessed Holy Spirit has brought us new life and hope and the presence of God with us always. Doesn't that also cheer your heart? “Tell the nations what God has done.”

And there's another reason to be cheerful – perhaps it is even the greatest of them. The psalmist writes, “Be glad that we *belong* to God; let all who worship the Lord rejoice.” (v.3) God is great – give thanks to the Lord. And God has done great things – sing praise! But thirdly, the Lord welcomes you and me into the family, like Abraham, like Jacob, like the whole people of Israel, God calls us to be released from slavery, to be brought home from exile, to be rescued from danger and liberated from the power of darkness. We are given a future and a hope, the assurance that in Christ the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has never and will never overcome it.

My dear friends, if you are struggling at the moment, you are not alone. We are all in this together and though we are isolated from one another physically we are reminded powerfully today that because we belong to God we belong to one another, that if one suffers we all suffer, and that if one has cause to rejoice then we all share in that joy. “Go to the Lord for help,” says the psalmist, “and worship God continually.” As we began by singing this morning, 'Father, I place into your hands the things that I can't do' so we continued in the plural, in the fellowship of faith, 'Father we love to walk with you and in Your presence rest, for we know we always can trust you.'

What reasons we have to be cheerful, my friends! Let us shout aloud with the psalmist this morning, “Be glad that we belong to God; let all who worship the Lord rejoice. Go to the Lord for help; and worship God continually.” And let us live that gladness in our daily lives that our neighbours and family and friends may see that we proclaim the Lord's goodness and the wonderful things that God has done, and may also come in God's time to find that transforming sense of belonging that we celebrate whenever we share together as a church.