

SERMON – 17/4/22**'The Kingdom, the Power and the Glory are Yours'**

Psalm 118:1-29

“The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone. The Lord has done this and it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice today and be glad.”
(Ps.118:22-24)

I remember watching a television programme about the great storm that famously and unexpectedly hit the south of England in 1987. In it the story was told of a couple who were sleeping in their caravan on the south coast when the noise of the storm woke them. All of a sudden their caravan was blown over and almost immediately was rolled over again by the wind. The husband told the story of how he eventually managed to squeeze out of the crumpled caravan and began to search the wreckage for his wife. He couldn't find her and fearing the worst he went to find help. He realised that people were taking shelter in the toilet block and when he went in who should be amongst the people there but his wife. She apparently had been thrown clear when the caravan had been blown over and she had watched in horror as she saw the van being blown over and over again sending her husband to what she was certain must have been his death. Standing in the wind, numbed by shock, someone had come to take her to the shelter of the toilet block. Imagine the joy that overcame the husband and wife when they saw each other both of whom thinking the other had been killed.

That is our joy today as it was the joy of the first witnesses of the resurrection. Jesus was dead, cruelly executed. There were witnesses and of that fact there was no doubt. He was dead and buried, and there were witnesses to that too. But with the dawning of the third day and with each of the subsequent days came testimony after testimony of the fact that Christ was risen from the grave.

Over these past weeks we have prayed in the words that Jesus taught and we have reflected on prayers that the psalmists had written of old and that would also have been taken on the lips of Jesus Himself.

With the psalmist we prayed the first Sunday of Lent: "You, Lord, are for ever exalted," seeking to honour and hallow the beautiful name of God.

With the psalmist we prayed the second Sunday: "In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly," as we longed for the coming of the Kingdom and the fulfilment of God's perfect will in this broken world.

On the third Sunday we prayed with the psalmist: "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing," as we sought to learn dependence on God for our daily bread.

With the psalmist we prayed on the fourth Sunday: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise," as we reflected on learning to confess our own sins and to forgive the sins of others.

On the fifth and sixth Sundays we prayed with the psalmist: "My soul is in deep anguish. How long, LORD, how long?" as we struggled with how to cope with temptation and "Give light to my eyes or I will sleep in death," as we sought deliverance from the reality of Evil.

Well what are we to pray this Easter Day? We read together this morning the exultant words of Psalm 118 and we could pick up many of those verses, as in fact the early church did in its worship and in its preaching: "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures for ever... The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I look in triumph on my enemies... Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: The LORD's right hand has done mighty things... I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done... and perhaps the best of them all, oft-quoted in the New Testament: The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes." (Psalm 118 *passim*) It is a hymn of victory and it should be our song not only this Easter Day but every day as we celebrate what God has so wonderfully and graciously done for us.

We read also this morning from the Book of Revelation where earlier in chapter 5 John has been in a similar position to that husband and wife in their caravan and in a similar position to those who watched Jesus die on the cross, staring catastrophe and hopelessness in the face: "I wept and wept, says John, because no-one was found who was worthy." (Rev.5:4) But John was told (and this summarises the significance of Easter Sunday) "Do not weep! - that was what Jesus said to Mary at the tomb that morning too - See the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed." (Rev.5:5) John turns to see this great Lion but what he sees is a Lamb looking as if it had been slain standing at the centre of the throne of God. And if that might have led to a sense of disappointment or anticlimax that is when he hears the countless multitude of angels singing "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise" (Rev.5:12) and every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that is in them - that includes us raising our voices here this morning: "To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power for ever and ever." (Rev.5:13) What seems at the Cross to be foolishness and weakness turns out in fact to be the wisdom and strength of God, as becomes abundantly clear not only at the empty tomb but every day since when God's people have recognised that the stone the builders rejected as useless turned out to be the one that holds everything together like the keystone in an arch.

So when we pray, whether praising God or lamenting the state of things, whether seeking God's face or confessing our sins, whether praying for others or seeking help and deliverance for ourselves, we should always come boldly and confidently because the victory is won - the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory belong to God in Jesus Christ for ever and ever, and the Amen we say loudly to that prayer is the sound of Christ's resurrection from the dead, an incontrovertible, unstoppable, everlasting victory.

Let our response to the Easter Gospel this year be a real knuckling down to pray, to 'take hold of God's willingness to give' (to quote my favourite definition of what prayer is, from Helmut Thielicke's World War II sermons on the Lord's Prayer). Let us

together be part of the army of God which marches on its knees and let us see what wonders God will do among us in these days as we take Him at His Word.

“The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone. The Lord has done this and it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice today and be glad.”

Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed!**