

## **SERMON – 30/6/24**

### 'Creation Sings'

“Sing to the Lord a new song for He has done marvellous things; His right hand and His holy arm have worked salvation for Him.”  
(Psalm 98:1)

As we enter the quieter days of summer many folk will be getting away for a break at some point and it's not really the time for anything too heavy on the preaching front. Nonetheless a lot of us will be around all summer and while it perhaps doesn't make sense to anything that follows on from week to week at this time of year I did want to do something over the summer that would hang together, so as part of our commitment to being an Eco-Church it seemed appropriate to me to take some time to reflect on aspects of Creation and on the character and work of the Creator, and to dip in to some of the Psalms over the next few weeks, since while each Psalm stands on its own they do all belong together and while there are many common themes that thread their way through the Psalms each one also has a character of its own. So my sermons over the summer will both hang together but also stand alone and I hope that whether you are here every week or whether you are dipping in and out depending on when you are at home or away there will be something for everybody.

Within the library of books that constitute the Holy Scriptures, the Book of Psalms is itself a volume of poems, penned by a variety of authors and in a variety of styles, expressing different emotions from boisterous praise to quieter, more reflective worship, from teaching to lament and even on the odd occasion angry cries for vengeance. It is said that whatever a person's mood there will be words in the Psalms that will help them express their emotion and I speak from personal experience when I say that I have probably learned more about prayer and about how to pray from the Psalms than from anywhere else. They were the hymnbook that Jesus was familiar with and they have brought encouragement, comfort and inspiration to millions over the centuries, so I commend the Psalms to you for your own devotions in these days. At times in my life I have taken a Psalm every day and made it my own prayer, and I have found that a very fruitful thing to do.

The Psalms are divided into five 'Books' and there is a certain significance to the order in which the Psalms are placed together. About half the Psalms are attributed to King David, although when a Psalm is headed with the words 'A Psalm of David', the Hebrew could also be translated 'A Psalm for David.' The Psalm we have read this morning belongs in a short run of seven that all celebrate the Kingdom of God, a very important theme throughout the Bible.

But what I would really like to focus on with you today is the theme of worship, and particularly the worship that the whole of Creation offers to God, celebrating His Kingship over the entire universe. As we unpack what this Psalm is teaching us, I would like to explore a number of questions.

First of all, what is it that we mean when we talk about worship? Depending on our upbringing (or the church tradition in which we feel most comfortable) we will have slightly different expectations of worship, but I expect that for most people music of some kind will be an important aspect of worship, and that is certainly something that comes out of this and other psalms. "Sing to the Lord a new song" our Psalm began, and later on there is a specific reference to music, and to particular musical instruments – a harp, a trumpet, a horn, as well as singing. But we should also take note that the psalmist speaks of offering praise to God through shouting for joy, and since the horn he refers to was probably a ram's horn rather than a metal one, the sound it made was likely to have been a blast rather than a tuneful note. There are also references here to clapping and to jubilation which may offer more of a challenge to those of us from a Presbyterian background than to those who come from different church traditions.

But actually there are more challenges to come our way, because the second question I would like to address concerns the identity of those who worship. Perhaps we begin reading the Psalm as an individual or as a congregation and we hear the writer, a person of faith, addressing us as believers. Perhaps naturally we assume that worship of God belongs within our comfortable circle, but the psalmist is quick to move out beyond the walls of the church, encouraging 'all the earth' (v.4) to shout for joy to the Lord and 'the world and all who live in it' (v.7) to resound with praise and to acknowledge God's victory. If God is

enthroned as King of the Universe then every knee should bow and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. In the words of our New Testament reading from Colossians 'all things have been created through Christ and for Him' (Col.1:16) and in everything He should have the supremacy. I wonder, does our expression of worship invite those around us to draw near and to join their voices with ours in honouring the living God? Because God's desire, expressed here in this Psalm, is that all the ends of the earth should see His salvation.

But it's the image of creation joining in worship that is the most arresting of all. "Let the sea resound and everything in it... let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy." (vv.7,8) What an amazing thought, that in the ebb and flow of tides, the crashing of waves and the tumbling of rivers God is worshipped. It is no accident that Psalm 19 with which I began the service this morning speaks about the heavens declaring the glory of God. Whether or not as human beings we lift our hearts to the Lord in praise the created order all around us is crying out in worship day and night. So don't let's have too good a conceit of ourselves in whatever style of worship we seek to honour God for it is but a tiny part of the ceaseless praise that rises from the whole created order.

God is worthy of all praise and honour and this psalm also gives us insight into some of the reasons why we should worship. God is the Lord Almighty, God is the King of the Universe and we can do nothing else but fall on our knees in praise as we consider who He is. But the psalmist does not only exalt the Lord for who He is but also declares what He has done. "Sing to the Lord a new song for He has done marvellous things." (v.1) And it's worth pondering what these marvellous things are because that is what turbo-charges our praise and lifts us from simply going through the motions to offering worship in spirit and in truth.

The psalmist speaks about a mighty victory and about saving power, he calls us to celebrate the work of salvation that God has accomplished – for the Old Testament people the rescue of Israel from slavery in Egypt through Moses and for us as New Testament people our rescue from sin and death through Jesus Christ – and he highlights aspects of God's character, inviting us to emulate them in our own lives: righteousness, love, faithfulness, justice and fairness. And doesn't that remind you of

the fruit of the Spirit that we were reflecting on last Sunday?

If there is a particular message to emerge from this Psalm for us to take hold of and take forward it is that God has not only won the victory and accomplished salvation (v.1), He has announced that victory and made it known not only to His own people but to all nations (v.2), not only for those who choose to gather for worship but for all people everywhere, and that all the ends of the earth have seen the victory of God's salvation (v.3). And those 'marvellous things' are both the reason for our worship and a challenge to us in the living out of our faith. If it is God's desire to declare and make known His marvellous deeds to every corner of the world so that people may see and believe, who are we to keep the Good News hidden behind closed doors for private consumption only?

The heavens declare God's glory, skies proclaim the work of His hands, the seas resound with praise, the rivers and the trees clap their hands, even the mountains sing for joy before the Lord. There are no words to their worship and yet, as Psalm 19 puts it, "They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." (Ps.19:3,4) and people the world over gasp in awe, longing to draw close to the Maker of all things as they recognise a higher hand at work all around them and within them. That is where the Gospel needs to be proclaimed, the message that makes sense of human beings' primeval longings and enables those who seek to find. That was the route Paul took in preaching Christ in Athens. When he found an altar inscribed to an Unknown God, he said, "That which you worship, then, even though you do not know it, is what I now proclaim to you." (Acts 17:23) And he goes on to tell the story of the coming of Jesus, His victory and the salvation He accomplished.

And that is what we too should be doing, at every opportunity when someone admires a sunset or a rainbow, a seascape or a mountain view, the intricate beauty of a flower or the wonder of a new-born. "Sing a new song to the Lord for He has done marvellous things." Let me tell you about how the Creator made Himself nothing for us and came into the world He made and which He loves with an everlasting love. As we read earlier from Colossians: "Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the

whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son's blood on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven." (Col.1:20)

The whole creation sings and, whether we recognise it or not, that touches people in the very deepest places of their being, calling to us to join our voices in the ceaseless song of praise and to make God's salvation known in Christ to the ends of the earth.

"Sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done marvellous things."