

Sermon

Sunday 18 July 2021

LESSON Psalm 137. : 1 - 6

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Why do we go to church? We go to be at one with God. We go to invite Him into our lives. We go to feel His presence. We go to get our lives into focus once more. Some of us come to church with worries and concerns. Some of us come with what seems to be intractable problems. Some of us are worried about something that has happened in the past; some of us are worried about the future; some of us may be worried about our health or the health of loved ones. When we think of what is happening in the world with Covid, with poverty, with global warming, with climate change, with man's inhumanity to man, with political conniving, with the melting of glaciers and of the polar ice caps, with terrorism - the list is almost endless, then there is little wonder that many of us are intensely worried about what is happening to us and to our world.

Our lesson from Psalm 137 told of a group of exiles who had lost most of the things that sweeten life. They were bereft of liberty and home. They had to listen to the mockery of their enemies who compelled them to sing songs of faith and hope when in this place of suffering and loss, it was the last thing they felt like doing. They found it hard to sing the Lord's Song in this land of pain and grief.

Sometimes we feel like these Jewish exiles. When the storm clouds close in around us - when the sky darkens and sorrow, suffering and anxiety invade our lives - then it is no easy matter to sing the Lord's Song. We find it difficult to profess our faith in God or even go to church. Of course it has never been an easy matter for men and women to hold on to faith and prayer when tragedy strikes and times are hard. You know, one of the hardest trials we might be called upon to bear, is to witness a dear one's pain and grief, and

to stand by feeling utterly helpless. I have sadly seen it happen many times - it strikes us to the core of our being.

How did Jesus react to this? How did he react to human pain and grief? How did he react when things went wrong, or when he came up against wrongs in the world? One of the first things we note is that he was always positive in His reaction. He always did or tried to do something. He didn't wallow in speculation or self-pity. We are tempted to say, "Why me. What have I done to deserve this," when things go wrong for us. I am not aware that Jesus went into the "whys and wherefores" at any time - he always acted positively - he always did something. I know that in many of the situations that concern us or beset us, there is little that we can do. But what we can do is to pray. Prayer is vital to our way of life and our wellbeing. Jesus found it so and so do we. You no doubt know the lovely story of the highlander, who was an atheist and was caught in his boat in a severe storm in the Minch. He did something he had never done before in his life - he knelt down and prayed and said, "O God if you get me out of this, I promise, I will never bother you again." I am not suggesting we should be like him, but it is important to unburden ourselves to God - not for Him to give an answer - but to uphold us, and if the problem concerns a friend or a local situation, then there is often something practical that we can do. Let us never forget that when God want something done, he has to get a man or woman to do it, and that someone might be you or me.

One of the great facts which enables us to hold on to our faith even when we are brought within the gambit of pain and sorrow, is the Cross. When we look at the Cross of Jesus we see not just a man hanging and suffering there - we see God Himself taking on human pain and transforming it through love into the victory of a new life. God knows what we might be going through - He has been there. He came through it, and our faith enables us to do the same. The supreme lesson the Cross demonstrates is that suffering and pain are not the end of the story - a new day will dawn.

The exiles could not sing the Lord's song because they felt God had deserted them, and from their position of captivity they could see no sign of His sovereign power at work. Possibly we might feel the same at times - with the things that trouble us, and with our world beset by seemingly insoluble problems, with millions starving and living in extreme poverty, with the greed and violence that seems to be manifest all over and of course with covid destroying the lives of so many people. How on earth can we sing the Lord's song?

Jesus never gave up his faith. However dark the times might have been - however cruel and godless men might be, Jesus believed that God was working His purpose out. He went to Calvary believing in that, even when His mission seemed to be a failure. He had given His all. He had utterly spent Himself for mankind, yet seemed to have had so little influence. He was so misunderstood that His last few hours were spent hanging in agony on a cross. Yet in spite of all that He never lost His faith, and on that dark day when mankind went as far in wickedness as mankind could go, God was not absent.

We are called upon to sing the Lord' song, even in the land of great anxiety, suffering, perplexity and cruelty - we are called to sing it however strange and hostile life might be. Our God is always with us, and because of that, because of what happened on the cross at Calvary, we can with confidence sing the Lord's song.

Amen