

Night and Day

Psalm 30; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Over the next few weeks we're going to look at some of the Psalms. An ancient father of the Church wrote about the Psalms in the C4th AD: "It is my view that in the words of this book the whole of human life, its basic spiritual conduct and ...its occasional movements and thoughts (are) comprehended and contained. Nothing to be found in human life is omitted."ⁱ

"In season and out of season, generation after generation, faithful women and men turn to the Psalms as a most helpful resource for conversation with God about things that matter most... (they articulate) profound praise to the utterance of unspeakable anger and doubt...The Psalms draw our enter life under the rule of God, where everything may be submitted to the God of the Gospel."ⁱⁱ

In our worship, we sing psalms most Sundays. Up until the middle of the C19th only Psalms were sung in services, and there were only around twelve tunes that were used to sing the psalms. Psalms have other uses. I sometimes use them as the basis of prayers. The 'hold' that Psalm 23, The Lord's my Shepherd, and Psalm 121, I to the hills will lift mine eyes', is strong in popular culture and still sung frequently at funerals.

There is something about the rawness and immediacy of the psalms that speak to people's hearts, getting under the skin of the soul and putting into words thoughts and feelings, hopes and doubts that we find hard to express by ourselves. Here are words of truth written by people (for there were many psalm writers) who can look us in the eye and say with conviction, "I know."

One of the many things that Psalms do is give words for gratitude. Psalm 30 is about a person who has been through a rough time, but has come through on the other side, and offers praise and thanks. Out of the darkest of times, as dark as being in Hell itself, God has reached in and helped out. In the time of darkness, was it suffering, was it rejection, was it isolation, was it fear, but in that time of darkness, help came. I think v2 is a clue. "I cried to Thee for help, and Thou

has healed me.” Pain often never feels worse than in the night, when all the usual distractions of living are stripped away and we are left on our own. But with the dawning of a new day the light shone, hope came, and a new perspective on life unfurled.

Weeping may tarry for the night,

But joy comes with the morning.

God is with us, during the night-time, and the day-time. It’s a theme that bubbles to the surface in so many expressions of human existence. You find it in a song by the C20th American Cole Porter:

*Night and day
You are the one
Only you 'neath the moon
Or under the sun
Whether near to me or far
No matter, darling where you are
I think of you
Night and day*

You even find it in the name of a popular cold and flu medication – Day and Night Nurse. That need for human beings to know that there is someone, somewhere, watching over you, caring for you, and there for you. We don’t always get it right in the Church, but it is what we try to do at services like these, and in the social and other events we organise. It is the community of faith, which creates a place and a time for each individual, so far as they are willing to engage. In a world that is increasingly fragmented and fractious, it seems to me that this is something that we in the Christian Church can offer, and offer unashamedly because of our faith in a God Who is there for us, night and day.

A couple of years ago as I returned to the Moderator’s Residence in the New Town, I found two young tourists sitting on the doorstep, weeping. I asked them why? “Because the world is so sad”, they said, and held on to each other. “And no one in the world to cares.” I invited them in for tea, and listened to their story of family tragedy and personal misfortune, which they had only just heard about, on top of all that was going on in the world at that time. It was good to talk, stranger to strangers, and to reassure them that though the world is tough and unpleasant and hard at times, they were not alone.

And nor are we. For that, as people of faith, we give thanks. God is with us, night and day.

It is one of the most humbling things in pastoral ministry when visiting people who, no matter how grim life is for them, something impels them to say they still have much for which they should be grateful. “Has there ever lived a soul so hardened, a heart so cold, or a mind so thoughtless as never to have felt the urge to say, ‘Thanks’? Such a one may not have addressed the God most of us know, may only have addressed some ‘unknown god,’ another person, or simply ‘luck’. Nevertheless, is there a human being so utterly void of the primordial instinct toward gratitude that he or she has never felt the urge to say, ‘Thanks’?”ⁱⁱⁱ

Thanksgiving, as G K Chesterton has memorably suggested in his little book on Francis of Assisi, is a matter of celebrating one’s dependence upon God. ‘Dependence’ literally means ‘a hanging from.’ An attitude of gratitude for the invisible but durable thread of God’s night and day dependable grace, comes to mark the faithful community’s response to God.

The writer of Psalm 30 knows this gratitude. He knows that in the night-time, as in the day-time, God’s presence has been real, and powerful, and has made a difference. Not a magic-wand-waving-away-the-problems difference; but the kind of difference that comes from being given steady and unequivocal support; the kind of infectious confidence that can turn mourning into dancing, and sackcloth into garments of gladness. The kind of optimism that leads us to say, “I will be all right, I am going to get there” after a time of bleak self-doubt, and real despair. The realisation also that we didn’t make it by ourselves, and that the help and support of others, uncalled and unbidden, was there all along, with God. Night and day.

The Swiss theologian Karl Barth is reported to have declared that there is only one sin, suggesting that the single sin from which ever lesser sin emanates is the sin of ingratitude – the failure to comprehend the theological truth that human life in all its beauty, abundance, and possibility is a gift. This psalm nudges us towards this awareness, and challenges us to be thankful.

There will be people worshipping today who need to hear this word of encouragement. Life has been hard, unfair, and the situations you face each night, each day, seem overwhelming.

Money is tight. Relationships are strained. Children are a worry. Parents need more support. Family demand too much. Work is draining. People have taken you for granted. You're tired and irritable. You're worried about the future.

And then Psalm 30. It doesn't airbrush reality. It doesn't pretend bad things don't happen to good people, or bury it's head in the sand. But it says, from experience, that weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning. However long that might take. And whether with weeping, or with joy, God remains. If this speaks to you today, it is meant, from God, for you.

It is why, through faith, and because of faith, we can join with the Psalmist and say that our souls will praise God and not be silent, and we will, because God remains, give thanks forever. Night and day.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen

ⁱ Athanasius, *Ad Marcellinum*

ⁱⁱ Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, p15

ⁱⁱⁱ P C Ennis, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C Vol 3, p202