

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor  
Good Friday, 25 March 2016  
Revd Dr Colin Dundon

## GOOD FRIDAY - WHO CARES?

### *Psalm 142*

#### **Introduction**

In Luke's Gospel (24.44ff) Jesus says of the Psalms that they announced his death and resurrection and the preaching of the Gospel. How they do that is ours to find out and I want to meditate on that this afternoon.

This Ps 142 is the heartfelt cry of an individual for God to work deliverance. We do not know the precise occasion but the superscription "A maskil of David. When he was in the cave. A prayer." Is suggestive. The ancient editors aren't telling us precise historical location but making a suggestion from the OT story about a suitable setting. For they were practical people and knew that complaint and prayer arose from practical circumstances.

Here they talk about when David was in the cave. There are two instances of David being in a cave.

In both cases David is on the run, life threatened, no way out, totally abandoned by all, and facing the power and wrath of his enemies. The cave is his prison. It is a suggestive setting.

How shall we read this psalm? I want to follow Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He wrote:

"The man Jesus Christ, to whom no affliction, no ill, no suffering is alien and yet who was the wholly innocent and

righteous one, is praying in the Psalter through the mouth of his Church. The Psalter is the prayer book of Jesus Christ.”

“How is it possible for a man and Jesus Christ to pray the Psalter together? It is the incarnate Son of God, who has borne every human weakness in his own flesh, who here pours out the heart of all humanity before God and who stands in our place and prays for us. He has known torment and pain, guilt and death more deeply than we. Therefore it is the prayer of the human nature assumed by him which comes here before God. It is really our prayer, but since he knows us better than we know ourselves and since he himself was true man for our sakes, it is also really his prayer, and it can become our prayer only because it was his prayer.” (*Psalms the prayer book of the Bible* p.20.)

Jesus died on the cross with the words of the psalter on his lips. I am going to read the psalm aloud and I want you to enter into its prayer as though you are praying it with David, with Jesus and with each other.

### **1-3a I cry to you**

As we meditate on these on verses I want to begin with the word cry. It is a special word of great importance. It comes from the Exodus story. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and they cried out.

In Ps 22 which Jesus prays from the cross, (My God, My God why have you forsaken me?) the poet reminds the people that the ancestors cried to you and were saved (5).

The psalmist cries out of deep oppression. He is powerless, helpless and alone. His distress is acute.

All he can depend on is God's mercy, God's grace. His spirit is faint. It has no strength. All he can trust is that God knows his way. He does not rely on his knowledge of God but God's knowledge of him. He has nothing else.

**Pause:** Think of this psalm as Jesus praying. It is his prayer. Now pray the prayer for yourself through Jesus.

### **3b-4 I am a target and all seems hopeless**

The poet is a target for people who wish to entrap him; kill him like an animal. His whole life's walk is dodging one trap after another. And there is no-one on the right hand; to protect.

There is no one who will enforce the right, use justice to protect, find compassion and mercy in their hearts. He is a refugee in a land of no refuge.

The situation is hopeless. No one puts out the caring hand; they are afraid or helpless. The situation is lonely because the community of God have abandoned him.

**Pause:** Think of this psalm as Jesus praying. It is his prayer. Now pray the prayer for yourself through Jesus.

### **5-6a Yet you are my refuge**

The psalmist can only affirm that "YOU are my refuge". The LORD alone offers mercy and justice, the LORD alone walks on the right hand. The psalmist's faith is the conviction of things not seen; it is counter intuitive. Nobody else can see it. How can he?

Even though his pain and loneliness and abandonment have brought him to a low dark place he still cries out. No one but the LORD will hear. This is his only hope.

**Pause:** Think of this psalm as Jesus praying. It is his prayer. Now pray the prayer for yourself through Jesus.

### **6b-7 Save me and set me free**

So his cry now takes shape. He wants deliverance just like that of the ancients who came out of Egypt. The poet asks for a personal exodus from prison.

The poet wants to worship again with thanksgiving on his lips; praise of the LORD'S name is his song. And he wants to worship in the presence of friends, helpers those who love the God who puts things to rights.

**Pause:** Think of this psalm as Jesus praying. It is his prayer. Now pray the prayer for yourself through Jesus.

### **Further reflections**

This psalm invites us live knowing that believing is seeing. Things are not as they appear. Trusting God we know and experience the very power of God. Apparent weakness is strength.

**Pause:** Does that describe our way of life as the people of God?

The psalm brings complaint and praise together and the glue is trust in the justice of God. In Christian terms we are confronted with the

inseparability of the cross and the resurrection. Jesus invites us to go about our business of living by taking up the cross empowered by the resurrection. The resurrection offers assurance for a difficult present and promise for the future. We live out the life of love by faith and in hope. We live in dependence of him who raises the dead; thus we are never alone.

**Pause:** Does that describe our way of life as the people of God?

This psalm is Jesus' prayer not just for himself but for the world that he made and loves; a world that cries out in pain of poverty, injustice, powerlessness and violence. God hears the non-persons of our world; the homeless the despised the seeker of refuge, women, children. God helps those who cannot help themselves. Even when they abandoned by the world and the community of God to their fate Jesus prays.

Thus there is a warning in this psalm. God hears the cry of those who have no one to do the right for them, to stand at the right hand.

**Pause:** Does that describe our way of life as the people of God?

Pray the psalm once more.

Amen.