

## **A comment before the Psalm**

### **FINDING JOY (IN WORSHIP TOGETHER)**

• The Psalmist in Psalm 84 talks about The joy of being in God’s house, the longing to be in worship, the happy moments of singing God’s praise. How are you going with this one – is it same old same old? Or like the Psalmist - *my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.*

What a privilege it is to when we his people turn up together – so many fellow believers in horrible situations would long to be in our situation, the freedom to sing and pray in this public way...

I saw a post on Facebook the other day: someone said as he was coming out of church I didn’t like the worship today, and he was answered by his mate, that’s ok we weren’t worshipping you...

What a rebuke, and an encouragement this psalm is to me today.

*I* had a brief pity party this week, I decided to tell God all the things I wasn’t happy about...

The bloke who wrote *this* was happy he was going to meet God in the meeting place. He was hungry and thirsty for God and it made him happy, even in the Valley of Weeping/Baca he was finding strength in God.

Kaboom.

How about I, and all of us, as St Paul tells us: *be filled with the Holy Spirit, <sup>19</sup> singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts. <sup>20</sup> And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

### **MEETING CHRIST, STAYING TRUE**

Intro:

How have your emotions and your brain ended up after these few weeks in politics? Six Prime Ministers in 6 years? 7 PMs in 10 -Really? We have just witnessed an unholy spectacle where the pretender to the throne fell on his face. Here’s one thing which stunned me: one of the first comments Mr Dutton, the former Immigration and Home Affairs Minister made after his resignation to Mr Turnbull, was that he would have liked to charter a flight and bring those men women and children stranded for years on Nauru to Australia. My challenge is – if you were a leader, and believed in it, why didn’t you do it? Will the widespread disenchantment and cynicism across Australia with Canberra save the current Prim Minister? Who knows? God knows. And we look to Him \_ God not Scott - in his word for life and strength and encouragement – Amen?

## • 1. Coming to the True Temple

2 Kings 8 **Solomon's Prayer of Dedication of the Temple** ...as the ark is brought to the Temple, containing the Torah – the tablets of the commands of God given to Moses on Mount Sinai...not just to temple but the holy of holies... imagine a nervousness... Solomon's prayer of dedication is magnificent. What would you or I have prayed? Solomon gets it right when he says:

*'But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!*

He is saying: we're realistic here Lord, the universe is *within you*, we can't confine you to a box! YET, You have set *this place* apart where we your people will be gathering and you have said: *My name shall be there*. Beautiful. *My name shall be there*. And then he puts before the Lord all the scenarios where sinful humanity goes off track, but he is asking if that they as individuals or as a community come and repent and seek your face in this place – you will hear and forgive. When there is calamity, disaster, plague – when your people humble themselves – please forgive and answer their cries. This will be a special house – a house of mercy, a house of forgiveness and fresh starts, of nation renewal.

This Temple = without the ark, the holy box with the Torah inside - it's just a building. Without the shekinah glory, God's holy presence – which before Solomon's prayer has filled the Temple like a cloud - it's just a building. Without the holy name of the Lord – its just a building. Like an old church turned into a pancake parlour.

Of course the history turned out badly in the end – this temple destroyed 370 years later by the Babylonians, the second temple of Herod destroyed by the Romans in 70AD.

So where's the continuity with us in the new era, new covenant, post Jesus' coming?... We know the early church met in the Temple and synagogues and in homes. There were no church buildings as such. BUT here's the best analogy I can think of: a house is built or bought, and when people who love each other move into it - it becomes a home? A home where bread is broken in hospitality, where grace is said, where God's word is read and prayers are said, that is a transformation of a home into a sacred place...

Just the same for us now. Without God's word and sacrament, his holy Spirit, this is just a building. Aah, when you have two or three gathered in Jesus' name... – there is Jesus with us.

We have travelled a bit in different parts of the world and visited church buildings and cathedrals – architectural monuments to the centrality of church to medieval life. Some of these places have been just that – old, and dead, monuments. Where Zwingli the great Swiss Reformer preached... Others were living places of worship. There was a feeling of life, of presence.

BUT, so that we don't get stuck on buildings, Temples, church buildings, even houses, the back end of the Bible proclaims with utmost clarity - that the Temple, and the Tabernacle before that, were pointing to Jesus. In chapter 1 verse 14 of John there is a beautiful verb. John has already told us that Jesus is the divine WORD, coeternal with God, the Creator of all things, BUT NOW came to live with us for a while – the verb skay-no'-o, literally pitched his tent or *Tabernacled* with us. Isn't that beautiful? My tenting days are probably over but I can still appreciate it! ... That is, Jesus is now revealed as the true Tabernacle, He is the bearer of the glorious divine presence. He is the enfleshment of the Word formerly represented in the tablets of stone in the ark.

And so Jesus wanders around, healing the sick, setting the oppressed free, teaching the people – the true tabernacle of God. And then in chapter 2 Jesus says to the crowd and especially the leaders ***destroy this temple and I'll raise it again in 3 days!*** What? Nebuchadnezza broke the first one up, this magnificent one now has a limited life - so but I tell you my body, my death and resurrection, this is the true Temple, the meeting place, the merging of heaven and earth. This is what you have been waiting for, looking for beyond the bricks and mortar: Jesus is the reality to which the old Temple pointed. He is the new true temple..., to whom we come as the One embodying both Word and Presence.

This is why we don't have to get too attached to buildings in the end, as good as they are, right? They come and go. We have access to this Temple Jesus, anywhere, anytime. If you are on a sickbed, Jesus is there, if you are in a prison cell, Jesus is there. If you are banished from your country and living in exile or a miserable camp somewhere, Jesus is there. Christ is a prayer away, a whisper from the heart, a groan in the soul, he is available. He is there in the joy of successes and the dark night of the soul, in the relief of achievement and the shame of defeat and sin, he is in the path of repentance and the kindness of a word of grace. As St

Paul says, Christ in us the hope of glory, never leaving us, never forsaking us, ever making all things new.

### **3. STAYING TRUE TO CHRIST WHEN THE HARD (OR GOOD) TIMES COME**

I am finding in my own life two things... a settled confidence in my relationship with the Lord – it has been a long journey – I gave my life to Christ before my confirmation 53 years ago - and I'm **still here!...**, BUT I am also finding, there are fresh temptations to let slip my allegiance, to go through the motions of being a mature Christian, to no longer love to study his Word, to not be as keen to share the Gospel, to not rejoice in the Lord. I may not be the blazing fire of my youth, but I hope there is still warmth from a fireplace of red hot coals on which to put some solid pieces of wood.

- In John chapter 6, our reading today, Jesus gives me/us some answers here. It tells us that Jesus was aware that among those following him were the ones coming along for the ride, who did not really believe – were they the ones who had received blessing from the feeding of the 5,000? v. <sup>64</sup> *But among you there are some who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him.*

So he gives a a fresh challenge, to sift out the shallow ones – <sup>56</sup> *Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.* <sup>57</sup> *Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.*

This word **abide** is used often in John's gospel. We don't often use it these days- we think of the great old hymn, *Abide with me.*

Jesus abides in the Father and the Father in him = **they share a common life and are united in love.** It is the most intimate union possible. The incredible thing that unfolds in Jesus' teaching is that Jesus invites those who want to follow him to also abide in him, and thereby abide in the Father. To enter into that intimate union with the Son and the Father.

In chapter 15 Jesus uses the imagery of a **branch and a vine** – the way the the branch bears fruit is to 'abide' in the vine – those who believe in him are the branches who must abide in him, the vine, and produce the fruit.

But here he says to abide in him we must eat him and drink him! What is this graphic imagery meaning? The writers of the Prayer Book got it right I think when in the holy communion liturgy they use the expression **we are to feed on him in our hearts by faith.** We do that of course when we eat the bread and drink the wine. But it is not confined to that moment – we are to feed on him in our hearts by faith, everyday, every moment. Sometimes consciously, sometimes not. We are injecting into our lives all the benefits from his life death and resurrection. When we forgive others we are feeding on him, because

we have taken into ourselves the forgiveness given to us. When we don't forgive we are not feeding on him, abiding in him. When we abide we are yoked to him in his choices, his priorities of the kingdom. When we lust, lie, hate, are hard-hearted, we are not feeding on him, not abiding.

Aah yes, this sort of eating gives *life*, eternal life. He is *the bread that came down from heaven, ...But the one who eats this bread will ..live... for ever.*'

So Jesus with this sort of forces a leadership spill, declaring positions vacant. You still with me? Some weren't. <sup>66</sup> *Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.* <sup>67</sup> *So Jesus asked the twelve, 'Do you also wish to go away?'* <sup>68</sup> *Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.* <sup>69</sup> *We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.*

I think Jesus has given me the chance to choose him again...

My near death experience last week in Bittern...

A fresh chance to follow no matter what the cost. The issue is not whether I'm happy or not. The issue is am I abiding in Christ. Have you found that at times? He refreshes his call upon us to renew our complete allegiance to him as Lord. . Who is your leader when it come to the push, when things are easy, when things are hard?

St Paul reminds us we are in a battle here my friends. It's not a battle just in Vietnam, or North Korea, or Saudi Arabia. it is not neutral ground here in Australia.... Paul reminds us and we need all the resources of God in the battle – spiritual armour, in order to stay in that abiding life in Christ, our true temple.