

## **Dis-orientation and Re-orientation**

**Preached at St John's Moruya, January 19<sup>th</sup> 2020**

**Readings: Psalm 40:1-14**

**John 1:29-42**

*I waited patiently for the LORD;*

*he inclined to me and heard my cry.*

<sup>2</sup> *He drew me up from the pit of roaring waters,<sup>[a]</sup>*

*out of the mire and clay,*

*and set my feet upon a rock,*

*and made firm my foothold.*

<sup>3</sup> *And He has put a new song in my mouth,*

*even a song of thanksgiving to our God.*

*Many will see it and fear,*

*and shall put their trust in the LORD.*

If you are, like me, you remember these words as the basis for the song '40', recorded by the Irish band U2 on their breakthrough 1983 album war.

The original psalm is a song of thanksgiving, it looks back to experience of deliverance, it says as it were "I was once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see".

However in their work U2 song doesn't come from Psalm 40:

It goes

How long to sing this song

How long to sing this song

How long, how long, how long

How long, to sing this song

How long, how long O Lord.

We find those words in Psalm 13:

*How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?*

*How long will you hide your face from me?*

<sup>2</sup> *How long must I wrestle with my thoughts*

*and day after day have sorrow in my heart?*

*How long will my enemy triumph over me?*

This is a song of lament.

It's a cry from the pit.

It's a plea for deliverance, knowing that deliverance has not yet come.

Thanksgiving and lament.

Lament and thanksgiving.

Both are notes struck in the Psalms.

And both are very much part of life.

In his work *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* Old Testament Scholar Walter Brueggemann suggests that the individual Psalms can be classed into three broad categories.

The first he calls psalms of orientation. They give voice to those times when life is orderly, good and reliable. They are the songs we sing, the words we pray when life seems just as it should be. And sometimes life is like that.

The second grouping he calls psalms of disorientation. They give voice to those times when life is topsy turvy, unpredictable even chaotic. They are the songs we sing, the words we pray when life seems out of control. And sometimes life is like that.

The third grouping he calls psalms of re-orientation. They give voice to those times when life is renewed, restored and re-calibrated. They are the songs we sing, the words we pray when life has come back into balance and order. And sometimes life is like that too.

Orientation.

Dis-orientation.

Re-orientation.

Three notes in the Psalms.

Three aspects of life.

This past fortnight many of us have been through a profound experience of dis-orientation.

Old assumptions have been shaken.

Assumptions that we can always control the forces that threaten us.

Assumptions that living in a relatively affluent country like Australia can insulate us from the kind of upheavals facing much of humanity.

Assumptions that our mistreatment of God's creation can continue indefinitely without consequences.

And then there have been the more visceral experiences of dis-orientation.

Time and time again as people have spoken about the events of the past three weeks they've recalled those moments when the sky turned black in the middle of the day.

There is nothing quite so dis-orientating as darkness at noon.

And long after the immediate crisis has passed the sense of dis-orientation may remain.

Some of us may carry it in our bodies, or notice it in conversations.

And in the Psalms we are given permission and offered words to name all that before God.

To be honest with God about where we are and what we are feeling.

How long O Lord

How long?

But that cry is not the end.

In most Psalms of Lament there is turning point, a moment when the mood changes.

So Psalm 13 concludes this way:

*But I trusted in your steadfast love;  
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.  
6 I will sing to the LORD,  
because he has dealt bountifully with me*

There is the moment of re-orientation.

In most Psalms it's not clear exactly what prompts this change in tone.

It could be an actual experience of deliverance.

It could be a word of promise.

It could simply be the relief and renewal that comes from having been honest with God.

Like all grace, the grace of re-orientation is like that.

We can't always predict when or how it will happen.

But we can have the assurance that it will happen.

The world will once again be revealed as a place of truth and goodness and beauty.

And when that moment comes - and it will come in different ways and at different times for all of us - the Psalms will give us words to name that before God as well.

And this building will once again resound with the heartfelt praises of God's redeemed people as they join with all creation in praise of their maker.

But how can we be confident that the moment will come?

Is this nothing more than wishful thinking or at best the inevitable cycle of life that tells us little or nothing about what or who dwells at the heart of the universe?

Let me tell you why I am confident.

I am confident because that experience of dis-orientation and re-orientation echoes the good news of what God has done in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In today's Gospel reading Jesus is acclaimed by His cousin John the Baptist as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world".

The word taking away has the sense of carrying or bearing.

As the Lamb of God Jesus takes away sin by taking it on Himself.

In becoming human, in seeking and serving, and supremely in his death on a cross Jesus enters into the most profound experience of dis-orientation.

He bears the chaos and the dis-order unleashed by our sin.

No wonder that on Good Friday the sky turned dark at noon ....

And then the silence of the tomb on Holy Saturday.

Even for the Son of God deliverance and re-orientation wasn't instant.

He waited patiently on the Lord and the Lord inclined to Him and heard his cry and lifted Him up from the very pit of death!

That's why I believe in re-orientation

Because the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the God of life from death, order from dis-order, and hope from despair. AMEN