

## Psalm 30

We've heard it a thousand times before, until it becomes an object of ridicule. Christian testimony... I used to be very, very bad. My life was in a mess, I was near to death, heading for disaster – but praise the Lord, Jesus saved me! So far, so good. But what about the day after the delivery of this testimony – once you have been saved, what about the day after that, and the day after that, and so on.

On and on and on and up and up and up. The American dream is an ideology by no means restricted to America – rags to riches, moral rags to moral riches. The only way is up! Strength to strength. It has seeped its way into a target driven mentality in which the entire business world has become enmeshed. Targets to meet for the coming year – setting goals, reaching our goals, improving upon last year's figures. Anything less is deemed failure... On and on and on and up and up and up. For one thing, the planet cannot sustain constant economic growth – sooner or later our resources run out.

We see it with oil for one thing. The psalmist speaks of having everything his way, of a time when everything was just hunky dorey, when he felt secure, when nothing could shake him. And in the last year or so we have seen all-too-painfully how shaky our economic security has been, with the financial disaster that has engulfed the globe. And of course, all too readily we see it this weekend.

When you hear the complaining, the griping, the finger pointing, it shows only too clearly how we feel secure, how angry we get when everything does not go our way. As though international flights and travel were a god-given right that has somehow been stolen from us! And so many people seem to have forgotten the risks involved in travelling, and in flying! And thank God, the only cost seems to have been that of mass inconvenience! Of course, there are countless human stories of hardship involved – and our own church is not untouched by difficulty. But really – have we simply become too secure, assuming that we can stride our way proudly around the planet as though we owned it! Sometimes the planet answers back! And what do we do then? For some people, you would think the world has already fallen apart!

When you hear “end of the world” language to describe the inconvenience suffered because of this weekend, doesn't it simply show how difficult it is for westerners in our generation to cope with not feeling totally secure?

When you hear end of the world language used to describe the economic hardship many, many people now face, how many times is it simply evidence that we have forgotten what it is to be human?

The psalm talks of being confronted with death at the moment he felt most secure. And certainly, being confronted with the death of an ideology we have treasured so deeply! It is a horrible experience, and it warrants end-of-the-world language. When the world we took for granted does not work as we thought it should, we must use end-of-the-world language, because that is precisely what it is.

When a job on which we depended, and in which we felt secure is lost – then it is deeply disruptive, and it does feel like the end of the world, and there is an experience of death.

When a relationship in which we felt secure ends without warning, then it does feel like the end of the world and there is an experience of death.

When we have taken our health for granted and find ourselves suddenly confronted with checks and scans and treatments and drugs, it can feel like the end of the world, and there is a taste of death.

### **Where is the boundary of your universe?**

The fantasy world built by David, the writer of this psalm, is broken, it hurts. And yet, this is an Easter psalm – it looks to be positive and upbeat. And, in a world where one of the ruling ideologies is this American and now European dream of rags to riches, the effects are disastrous: taking a psalm that focuses on salvation AFTER disaster, of blessing AFTER anger, of happiness AFTER sadness, the result is disastrous.

It is disastrous because we are most likely to misread the psalm with naïve thought about past, present and future being tidily distinct from one another. “The past is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift – that is why it is called the present!” This belief that time can be so easily segregated into past, present and future.

What is the result? In Christian circles, the temptation has always been to say then, that because we are moving from moral rags to moral riches, on and on and on and up and up and up – every testimony, every sermon, every Christian paperback seems to talk as though ... All our mistakes are made in the past tense, but in the future we are going to heaven, so let's be free to live our life and be decisive today! Of course, it's smuggled through a veneer of surface humility, but the driving ideology remains the same.

But you don't find this in the psalm. Past, present and future are not so easily disentangled. Given the prevailing ideology of self-improvement, it sounds almost offensive now to say that our history, our personal history, the things that have shaped us, the things that have happened to us, the things we have done – will shape our future! There is no running away from yourself to take refuge in a future that will never arrive!

In the Christian life, disaster can strike at any time! Not just in the past! Perhaps the best way to grasp the psalm is to grasp how the Hebrew people understood time. It has best been described using the picture of rowing! When you are a rower, sat in a boat – you travel forwards by looking backwards! If you're constantly turning your head around to look forward, which after all is the cox's job, you don't row as hard, you upset the balance of the boat, and you slow the whole thing down. As a rower, you move forwards by looking backwards. And this is how the Hebrew Scriptures work. The people are constantly reminded of who God is by looking at his great deeds in the past and by praising that God who is alive today.

And by praising the God who has done great things in the past, you are praising a God who is worthy to be praised. A God who keeps us on the move, a God who does not abandon us to death. So that when a world falls apart – when the nation of Israel is overrun, when our relationships breakdown, it is the same God who is praised. Not because those awful things have happened – but because whatever it is that has broken down, whatever world it is that has fallen apart, whoever it is that has died, God is still there – and the world as a whole has not ended.

That is why this is used hundreds of years later as a resurrection psalm. The resurrection is always preceded by the cross, the crossing of the Red Sea is always preceded by the Egyptian army with drawn swords, new life always preceded by death.

And that is what we celebrate at this remembrance meal. Here, the past and the present and the future all come together. We remember the death of Christ, joining with him in our own experience of death today, our own failures, our own weaknesses, our own shattered hopes, our own broken securities. And we look to a future, made possible by the resurrection of Christ. A future that does not await us like some blank page waiting to be written by our own good intentions, not some future undiscovered territory waiting to be conquered, but a future that comes to us as a gift, new days full of grace and forgiveness and new life. And here, today, we stop – and we rest in the presence, in the temporal, spacial presence of this God, who here and now, has been seen to build a thousand futures before.

This God who, when everything has failed, from inconvenience to disaster, from the taste of death be it small or great, this is a God to be praised. A God who does not abandon us to the grave. A God who, here and now, waits to greet us with the gift of this new life – should we dare to accept it.