

## Psalm 40

I would love to have seen the time when the first draft of this psalm was penned. Who wrote it? Where were they sitting? What is the situation that gave rise to the psalm? What kind of miry pit was the psalmist in, when the Lord lifted him out of it?

The material we use for Sunday club and liturgy for the readings is Roots magazine. And though I rarely use the bible commentary it offers, I glanced at it this morning: and it helpfully, said of author of this psalm, that he “remembers and praises God’s faithfulness for bringing him out of danger and instability, to security and safety.” Security, and safety.

It made me laugh because last night I watched a movie called Knight and Day. It begins a basic spy movie with all the mystery and standard twists that you expect of contemporary spy movies. My 11 year son Willem, summarises the basic plot of all these spy movies with the words, “Mr President, we have a situation!” But actually, this movie was much cleverer than that, and completely tongue in cheek.

And in this movie, Tom Cruise plays a highly trained James Bond-like action spy. And he warns the beautiful air-headed civilian (played by Princess Fiona out of Shrek – what was her name, Cameron Diaz) he warns the other character that should she be approached by the FBI – she should listen out for some key words. Because when they say words like security and safety – it means they are going to kill her.

So of course, she ends up in a big black car, with men in black suits, promising to take her to a safe house where she will be safe and secure. And the words safe and secure were repeated so many times, she freaks out and an action sequence begins.

The novel component of the movie was this: The meaning of safety and security was turned on its head. Everything that this woman had before was safe and secure. And yet the world she knows and trusts – the safe and secure world – is actually the one that is fraught with danger.

By contrast, the other character in the film, the Tom Cruise character – has the mad eyes, the insane way of speaking – and the very things that embody the precise opposite of safety and security. Everywhere he goes, there is trouble. Running and shooting and stabbing and drugging and violence and danger. And yet, by the end of the movie, she finds herself telling the FBI officers, that the only time she feels safe, is with this dangerous individual.

The notion of what it means to be safe and secure is turned inside out upside down and back to front by this movie.

And that is why, I would love to see the situation, the context in which psalm 40 was penned. Someone waited patiently for God to come and deliver him from a miry pit. Someone, waiting patiently for God to come and bring him to a position of security! What was that situation - ? What did it mean to be unsafe? What did it mean to be secure?

Since 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2001 – the Security has become an increasingly marketable commodity. So much so, that we are taught now, to feel insecure, unsafe, unsatisfied – in every conceivable area of our lives. Nationally, economically, personally.

## **National Security:**

The second Gulf War, the mess that we have created in various parts of the Middle East, was sold to us the basis of National Security! Our nation is insecure – our defences have been penetrated – so what do we need to do. We need to root out the greatest perceived enemies of our time. 9-11 saw 2996 deaths. In retaliation, it seemed, national security was served by sending young men off to war. Since this war, fought in the interests of national security, there have been 4753 military casualties by coalition forces in Iraq. 2299 military casualties in Afghanistan.

Civilians in Iraq? Well, nobody is counting that! Estimates stand at around 100 thousand, but nobody knows for sure! So – there, in the interests of National Security – at the very least, it raises the question of whether we live in a more or a less secure world than we did before 9-11.

When security becomes a justification, or even when safety and security become a legitimate goal for a nation, I shudder at what that is likely to mean.

## **Economic Security:**

Economic security is not what it once was! And now, of course, we're supposed to leave the poor bankers and their bonuses alone. In fact, this week, at Disciples on the Way, we had the first instalment of a mini series on the current Economic Climate. And last week Dave Porter outlined something of how we got into this fine mess.

I can't remember if it was Dave or someone else, who said that there is no such thing as a completely safe investment – even in government bonds. Gilt edged securities are a thing of the past. And many of those who have entrusted themselves in the security of the economic investments, have found their security obliterated. And how does that leave you feeling? It raises the question of what it means to seek financial security in the first place, which is the kind of discussion we will be having this coming Wednesday evening at 7pm, when Tim Jones will be our main speaker.

## **Personal Security:**

This, in turn, raises the question of where we invest our own personal security. I don't mean whether we have our own private bodyguards. I mean in the way that we relate to others. We like to feel secure – and because we like to feel secure – then being secure can all too easily become a goal.

In our relationships with people – if they act in ways that make us feel insecure, then something is wrong! If their way of working, or thinking or speaking, makes us feel insecure – how well are we going to relate? All too easily, we like to feel secure in our world – and will surround ourselves with people who nod their heads with us, making us feel secure, confirming and strengthening us in all the unwitting prejudices and views we treasure so deeply.

Think for instance about what we read. I have Christian friends, who will only read sound Christian books. Books that confirm what they already know and believe – helping them to be secure in their faith. They never learn anything new, of course. But for the sake of feeling

secure, they will read sound books about the Christian faith. For them, being secure in the faith, means being bold enough never to allow any questions to be asked of it. But how about reading books by atheists? By Moslems? By people whose beliefs differ profoundly from our own? Those obsessed with their own creedal security, are about the most insecure people you are likely to meet. Simply because they cannot cope with an opposing belief – cannot listen to anything that doesn't make me feel secure. In precisely the same way that certain governments cannot listen to supposed enemies, waging war on them instead – and in the end, in the interests of national security, make their nation less secure.

This week's readings take us back to the Baptism of Jesus. And part of what baptism means is radical exposure to insecurity. In fact, to be baptised is to abandon security and to embrace this Jesus. Not that I am wanting to compare Tom Cruise to Jesus – but when Cameron Diaz character abandons all that makes her feel safe and secure, to be in the presence of the wild-eyed, dangerous wrecker of havoc – there is a little picture of what baptism really is.

Israel, in Jesus' day, was insecure. Occupied by the great empire of Rome. Its national security was jeopardised. Its economic security was obliterated. People's personal security was shaky to say the least. And everybody knew, that if Israel were to have a deliverer – that deliverer would be a Lion. The Messiah, the liberator, the Great Lion of Judah who would bring the people, at last, true security. Israel needed a lion.

And what did it get? It got a lamb! The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And the new age of security, is ushered in by a baptism, by a wiping the slate clean, by an abandonment of all that we think and know, and think we know, and long for and hope for and dream of. To be baptised, is to abandon all security, for the sake of an unknown and unfamiliar security, based upon a relationship with this Jesus.

As long as the desire for safety and security remains paramount, true safety and true security remain forever out of reach.

Throughout the history of Israel, safety and security have remained false Gods. Listen to the prophets: From the time when the nation struck up alliances with other nations, great distant political gestures that short-circuited the need for personal and political justice, Israel always faced disaster.

And here, it seems, in Psalm 40, the same logic runs. And whoever the psalmist is, they have not needed national or economic or personal security for the sake of the safety they have experienced. The psalm that began thanking God in the past tense for the deliverance experienced, is not written by someone with their feet up on a reclining armchair, in a nice palace with an assured pension. The psalm that began with a celebration of the safety and security offered by the living relationship with this God, ends with a personal note:

“As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help, and my deliverer. Do not delay, O my God.”

Suddenly we are back in the present tense. The need for deliverance will come again. Security and safety are nothing to do with a state of affairs at which we arrive. They are everything to do with the way that we choose to live here, and now. Aim for security and we will never experience it. Foster this living relationship with a loving God, and security and safety lose their status as goals even as they become a reality.