

PSALM 37 verses 1-7

Do not fret because of those who are evil
or be envious of those who do wrong;
2 for like the grass they will soon wither,
like green plants they will soon die away.

3 Trust in the Lord and do good;
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.

4 Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.

5 Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him and he will do this:

6 He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,
your vindication like the noonday sun.

7 Be still before the Lord
and wait patiently for him;
do not fret when people succeed in their ways,
when they carry out their wicked schemes.

MEDITATION

I've had a few people ask me if I think the Coronavirus pandemic is a plague sent by God. I guess that behind the question there lies the Old Testament story of how God sent ten plagues on Pharaoh and the Egyptians when Moses was trying to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. The simple answer is that I do not think COVID-19 is a plague sent by God. Let me explain why.

Jesus gave us a new understanding of disease, disability and disaster. He did not see them as being sent by God to punish people. John's Gospel records the story of how Jesus encountered a man blind from birth. The disciples asked Jesus about the cause of his blindness, whether the man himself had sinned or his parents. Jesus answered that it was neither, but that God's power might be displayed in curing him. Whatever the cause of suffering, Jesus always sought to overcome it, to heal a person and improve their quality of life.

When you think about the current virus, the people who have died from it have largely been elderly or folk with underlying health conditions. If it was a plague to wipe out the wicked, we would have expected God to target terrorists, murderers, violent folk, those who have swindled innocent individuals out of large sums of money and so on. But that has not happened.

Innocent people have died and the wicked have gone unpunished. That brings us to the issue which was raised in Psalm 37. Why is it that the wicked so often prosper and the good so often suffer misfortune? That is one of the most perplexing problems for people of faith. But

the psalmist does not really the question. What he does is to urge us to leave the matter in God's hands, to live in humble faith and unswerving fidelity to God. We should not envy the rich, criticise the wicked or in any way evaluate the lives of others. Instead we should be content with our own lives and live them as well as we possibly can.

However, I wonder whether we can do more. Although I do not see the virus as a plague sent by God, I believe he may be speaking to us through it. Some of the injustices in our society have been exposed – the struggle of the poorly paid and the unemployed and prejudices directed against coloured people. We are also coming to realise that our young folk are not going to have the same job opportunities as we have had and they will have to bear more than us the burden of taxation to pay back the money borrowed for the current pandemic.

Of course, we may not want to get involved in politics. But we have the example of Jesus who sought to overcome suffering and injustice and improve the quality of people's lives – including our own!!

PRAYER

O God our Father, we praise you for Jesus Christ, our Lord. We praise you for all the love and care which he expressed, sometimes in the face of fierce opposition. We give you praise that he sought to alleviate the suffering of others, overcoming disease, disability and disaster.

We confess our own lack of love and our failure to reflect adequately the care of Jesus. Forgive us that we are so often blind to the suffering of others. Forgive us that we miss so many opportunities to care for them and improve the quality of their lives.

Grant us courage to stand up for what is right, even when the going gets tough. Give us the strength we need to persist, when enthusiasm begins to wane and we grow tired.

Heavenly Father, we pray for all who suffer in body, mind or spirit. Heal the sick, mend their brokenness and make them whole. We pray for those who are discriminated against on the grounds of their race, sex, religion or political opinions. May those who are tortured or languish in dark prisons know your strengthening presence. We pray for those who face hardship through unemployment or unfair economic systems.

We pray for people who quietly serve those around them, who without fuss, see what is needed and do it. We pray also for those engaged in public service, for local and national politicians. We pray for charities engaged in work in those parts of the world where the need is greatest. We remember too the work of the United Nations Organisation in all its endeavours for peace and justice.

We pray for all who wrestle with doubt, including sometimes ourselves. Take away the envy and jealousy of others, the blindness and laziness of thought which contribute to unbelief. Grant us all a humble faith and a steady trust that gives our lives true direction. Keep us faithful to you, so that we may always put love before ambition and goodness before success, to the honour of your name.

We pray through Jesus Christ your Son, to whom, with you, O Father, and the Holy Spirit, be the glory both now and evermore. AMEN.