



# A Journey through the Psalms



notes for reflection and prayer

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We are going through a time of isolation in which many of us have a lot of time to spend alone with our own emotions. The psalms seem made for such a time. They show a whole range of human reactions to different situations, some good reactions, some decidedly not good. In many of them we see the psalmist working through his own conflicted thoughts towards some kind of overall understanding. I think it's good that the Bible contains these compositions which are honest, human, and often not 'on message'.

Contrary to previous generations, we don't have very much contact with the psalms these days. They are (almost) never used as readings in our Sunday worship, and if they were I guess the response at the end of some of them would be: 'This is most definitely not the word of the Lord - **Thanks be to God**'.

The portrayal of God in the psalms, and in many parts of the Old Testament, is a primitive, very human one. He is mysterious, capricious, sometimes dangerous, not always attentive, he has changing emotions, he can be argued with, pleaded with, and persuaded.

When thinking about prayer, some might argue, 'Why ask God to do things if he is all-knowing, all-seeing, all-powerful, all-caring? We are supposed to be thankful to God, but does that make any sense if it's all no trouble to him anyway? We might be awed by his works, as we might be awed by the CGI effects in a film, but can there be any wonderment at the extent of his power if he is omnipotent?'

In a philosophic view of God, prayer is shown as being of value for our sake, for our spiritual development, but it doesn't achieve anything more than that. That doesn't satisfy our natural view of prayer, in which we seek to reach out beyond ourselves, in care for others.

The Psalms teach us that we should give up any thought of a philosophic understanding of prayer and see it as a very human activity, and our relationship with God as like a human relationship (with obvious differences of course). We know on one level that it makes no sense to try to persuade God, but in human relationships we do persuade and plead and thank and explain and apologise and everything else, and we believe that God comes to us on a human level.

In these reflections we will cover a range of Psalms, including some of the bleak ones, not just the uplifting ones. Some will be relevant to your present situation, others won't, but may give you resources for what lies ahead.

Some of the reflections consider what the writer was experiencing when they wrote. Others are the sparks of ideas that are generated by our contributors as they hear the words of the Psalms for themselves. Both are appropriate ways to respond when pondering these words. Before you read what our contributors offer, sit with each Psalm yourself. Use them as part of your own prayers. Ask yourself, 'What is it saying? How does it make me feel? Do I ever feel like talking to God in that way?'

Whilst it is good to reflect on the psalms, it's even better to say them out loud if you have the conditions that allow that.

<sup>1</sup> I waited patiently for the LORD;  
he inclined to me and heard my cry.

<sup>2</sup> He drew me up from the desolate pit, out  
of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock,  
making my steps secure.

<sup>3</sup> He put a new song in my mouth,  
a song of praise to our God.  
Many will see and fear,  
and put their trust in the LORD.

<sup>4</sup> Happy are those  
who make the LORD their trust,  
who do not turn to the proud,  
to those who go astray after false gods.

<sup>5</sup> You have multiplied, O LORD my God,  
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts  
toward us; none can compare with you.  
Were I to proclaim and tell of them,  
they would be more than can be counted.

<sup>6</sup> Sacrifice and offering you do not desire,  
but you have given me an open ear.  
Burnt offering and sin offering  
you have not required.

<sup>7</sup> Then I said, *'Here I am;  
in the scroll of the book it is written of me.'*

<sup>8</sup> *I delight to do your will, O my God;  
your law is within my heart.'*

<sup>9</sup> I have told the glad news of deliverance  
in the great congregation; see, I have not  
restrained my lips, as you know, O LORD.

<sup>10</sup> I have not hidden your saving help  
within my heart, I have spoken  
of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have  
not concealed your steadfast love and your  
faithfulness from the great congregation.

<sup>11</sup> Do not, O LORD,  
withhold your mercy from me;  
let your steadfast love  
and your faithfulness keep me safe forever.

<sup>12</sup> For evils have  
encompassed me without number;  
my iniquities have overtaken me until  
I cannot see; they are more than the  
hairs of my head, and my heart fails me.

<sup>13</sup> Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me;  
O LORD, make haste to help me.

<sup>14</sup> Let all those be put to shame and  
confusion who seek to snatch away my life;

let those be turned back and brought to  
dishonour who desire my hurt.

<sup>15</sup> Let those be appalled because of their  
shame who say to me, *'Aha, Aha!'*

<sup>16</sup> But may all who seek you rejoice and be  
glad in you; may those who love your  
salvation say continually, *'Great is the LORD!'*

<sup>17</sup> 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.

Are you by nature a patient person or impatient, calm or restless? In our current situation we are experiencing the need for patience. It comes more naturally to some than to others. This psalm starts off with the theme of patient waiting being rewarded, but even at the end patience is still needed, because the psalmist has to call on God not to delay. It's easy to get frustrated. For those who find waiting difficult this lockdown is a trying time, but also an opportunity for growth of character. When the psalmist feels that God has pulled him up out of the pit into which he had sunk, his reaction is to praise God openly in the great congregation. That's not an option open to us, and we are having to explore new ways of telling what God has done for us.

One of the dangers of our situation is to allow isolation to get the better of us - to start to choose it - perhaps that is the desolate pit that we need to be pulled out of. In thanking God for his deliverance the psalmist rejoices in two things, that he has an open ear and that he has not held back from telling what God has done for him. Keeping our lines of communication open with our fellow church members might be our equivalent of that.

Those who have been through serious illness, whether from coronavirus or something else, and have come safely through it, may have the impression of having been in a desolate pit, and are thankful to have been rescued from it. As well as giving thanks to medical staff and all who have provided care, we also thank God for his steadfast love.

<sup>1</sup> When the Lord restored  
the fortunes of Zion,  
we were like those who dream.  
<sup>2</sup> Then our mouth was filled with laughter,  
and our tongue with shouts of joy;  
then it was said among the nations,  
<sup>3</sup> *'The Lord has done great things for them.'*  
The Lord has done great things for us,  
and we rejoiced.

<sup>4</sup> Restore our fortunes, O Lord,  
like the watercourses in the Negeb.  
<sup>5</sup> May those who sow in tears  
reap with shouts of joy.  
<sup>6</sup> Those who go out weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
carrying their sheaves.

This is an unusual psalm but I like it. The first part is a memory of God's faithful actions in the past, recognized even by other nations, and of past rejoicing! But the second half of the psalm makes clear that this psalm has in fact been written in a time of struggle. It is a prayer that God will restore them again - just as water returns to a dry river bed in the desert. The psalmist is enabled to see the time of struggle as a season rather than how things will be from now on. There is a picture of those going out to sow seed in a springtime of despair returning rejoicing with the harvest. Is it the same day as it appears in the text, or months later? In any case the work done in tears comes good.

This all feels very relevant at the moment. There have been tears in our house (I'm not saying whose but more than one person). There has been trying to get some work done amidst various frustrations. There have been ponderings about how long the current situation might go on for and how it might affect us in the longer term. I expect you are struggling with these or similar issues too. You can use either the words of the psalm or your own words to pray for God's restoration in our current situation.

<sup>1</sup> I love the LORD, because he has heard  
my voice and my supplications.  
<sup>2</sup> Because he inclined his ear to me,  
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.  
<sup>3</sup> The snares of death encompassed me;  
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;  
I suffered distress and anguish.  
<sup>4</sup> Then I called on the name of the LORD:  
*'O LORD, I pray, save my life!'*

<sup>5</sup> Gracious is the LORD, and righteous;  
our God is merciful.  
<sup>6</sup> The LORD protects the simple;  
when I was brought low, he saved me.  
<sup>7</sup> Return, O my soul, to your rest,  
for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.  
<sup>8</sup> For you have delivered my soul from death,  
my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.  
<sup>9</sup> I walk before the LORD in the  
land of the living.  
<sup>10</sup> I kept my faith, even when I said,  
*'I am greatly afflicted';*  
<sup>11</sup> I said in my consternation,  
*'Everyone is a liar.'*  
<sup>12</sup> What shall I return to the LORD  
for all his bounty to me?  
<sup>13</sup> I will lift up the cup of salvation  
and call on the name of the LORD,  
<sup>14</sup> I will pay my vows to the LORD  
in the presence of all his people.  
<sup>15</sup> Precious in the sight of the LORD  
is the death of his faithful ones.  
<sup>16</sup> O LORD, I am your servant; I am your  
servant, the child of your serving-maid.  
You have loosed my bonds.  
<sup>17</sup> I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice  
and call on the name of the LORD.  
<sup>18</sup> I will pay my vows to the LORD  
in the presence of all his people,  
<sup>19</sup> in the courts of the house of the LORD,  
in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!

This is a joyful, uplifting psalm. True, it does speak of dark times, times when the psalmist was close to death, when his eyes were filled with tears, when he felt greatly afflicted and thought that nobody could be trusted. But whereas in many psalms there is an ongoing

struggle between hope and despair, between belief and doubt, between rejoicing and anguish, here the dark times are all in the past. The psalmist has called on the Lord and the Lord has heard him and delivered him from all his troubles.

The psalmist speaks as if this is a once-for-all victory over his troubles; he was deep down in the pit of despair and now the Lord has brought him up, and he's going to stay up. That probably was not true for him, and it isn't true for us - at least not on the superficial level of our day to day experience. We have a succession of ups and downs, sometimes even within the same day.

I think this is a good psalm to read, not in a self-deluding way of thinking that all problems have been solved, but as a reminder that when we feel down that's only temporary. It also reminds us that, although on a superficial level our feelings fluctuate, on a deeper level the Lord has rescued us in a way that is secure and unchanging.

Verse 9 reminds us that there is only one time and place for serving God, that is now, in our current situation. Verse 10 underlines the importance of constancy in our faith even when we're feeling low. And verses 14 and 18 are particularly relevant for us at present, as they speak of us all meeting together again.



Week 2:Mon

## Psalm 4

Heather Adams

<sup>1</sup> Answer me when I call,  
O God of my righteousness;  
you set me at liberty when I was in trouble;  
have mercy on me and hear my prayer.  
<sup>2</sup> How long will you nobles  
dishonour my glory; how long will you  
love vain things and seek after falsehood?  
<sup>3</sup> But I know that the Lord has shown me  
his marvellous kindness;  
when I call upon the Lord, he will hear me.  
<sup>4</sup> Stand in awe, and sin not;  
commune with your own heart  
upon your bed, and be still.

<sup>5</sup> Offer the sacrifices of righteousness  
and put your trust in the Lord.

<sup>6</sup> There are many that say,  
'Who will show us any good?'

Lord, lift up the light of  
your countenance upon us.

<sup>7</sup> You have put gladness in my heart,  
more than when their  
corn and wine and oil increase.

<sup>8</sup> In peace I will lie down and sleep,  
for it is you Lord, only,  
who make me dwell in safety.

*(Common Worship Psalter)*

This time I'm not going to say anything about the content of the psalm. This is the psalter version and I remember it in snatches, with music. I struggle with too many thoughts and prayer escapes me as words and worries rush through my head. Music cuts through the chaos, snatches of psalms chanted in the few years when I used to attend Evensong, remembered verses from the middle of hymns (and then as I hum along there is the challenge of working out how the hymn begins). I am sometimes jealous of those for whom prayers seem to come naturally in the midst of everyday life in a way my brain doesn't seem to be able to cope with.

God has to cut in at the corners with me, using music to get past my defences - I don't suppose it matters which way it is, so long as he gets in somehow.



Week 2:Wed

## Psalm 111

Mike Taylor

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD!  
I will give thanks to the LORD with my  
whole heart, in the company of the upright,  
in the congregation.  
<sup>2</sup> Great are the works of the LORD,  
studied by all who delight in them.  
<sup>3</sup> Full of honour and majesty is his work,  
and his righteousness endures for ever.  
<sup>4</sup> He has gained renown by his wonderful  
deeds; the LORD is gracious and merciful.  
<sup>5</sup> He provides food for those who fear him;

he is ever mindful of his covenant.

<sup>6</sup> He has shown his people  
the power of his works, in giving them  
the heritage of the nations.

<sup>7</sup> The works of his hands are faithful and just;  
all his precepts are trustworthy.

<sup>8</sup> They are established for ever and ever,  
to be performed  
with faithfulness and uprightness.

<sup>9</sup> He sent redemption to his people;  
he has commanded his covenant for ever.  
Holy and awesome is his name.

<sup>10</sup> The fear of the LORD  
is the beginning of wisdom all those  
who practise it have a good understanding.  
His praise endures for ever.

When Jesus taught his disciples the prayer which we now know as the Lord's Prayer, it was in response to their request, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.'

What were they asking for? What had John given to his disciples which they now wished to receive from Jesus? I think they were asking for a community prayer, something which they could pray in common and which would express the relationship with God which Jesus was teaching them. Certainly Jesus's reply seems to take that form, and the Christian church ever since has regarded it as a community prayer.

There is a common view that real prayer is personal, freely expressed, from the heart, and there is, quite rightly, an aversion to mindless repetition of set prayers. But the use of set prayers does not need to be mindless repetition. Many people find that using set prayers frees them from having to think up the right words and enables them to concentrate on what they are saying. Many people use a mixture: either switching between set prayers and extempore prayers, or using a set prayer and inserting some personal bits into it. It's for each to find what works for them best.

Even for those who are completely at ease with praying freely from the heart, it is good not to neglect the strength that comes from

a shared prayer, and from knowing that others are praying the same words.

Psalm 111 is a straightforward psalm of praise. It does not have the conflicted emotions found in some of the other psalms. Try using it as part of your prayers this week, saying it aloud if you have suitable conditions for that.

Week 2:Fri

## Psalm 131

Heather Adams

<sup>1</sup> O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,  
my eyes are not raised too high;  
I do not occupy myself with things  
too great and too marvellous for me.

<sup>2</sup> But I have calmed and quieted my soul,  
like a weaned child with its mother; my soul  
is like the weaned child that is with me.

<sup>3</sup> O Israel, hope in the Lord,  
from this time on and for evermore.

Sometimes in our faith we concern ourselves with big and challenging ideas and stir ourselves up to action. This short psalm brings us back to a place of security and quietness. I feel it is a good picture for us at the moment.

We can picture ourselves as a child on its mother's lap - safe and secure in the relationship. This speaks to our need for safety and security in these insecure times. If the mother is God, then this suggests a relationship with God that is close, unconditional, loving and secure. We can reflect on this secure relationship as we face uncertainty and are limited in the ways we can actively address it!

We also have a role in providing a sense of security for others in these uncertain times. There are parents helping young children find a routine when there is no school, there are people helping a neighbour or friend who is finding this time particularly bewildering, there are those who are looking after other people's needs at work or at home day after day.

Each of us is involved in keeping one another safe at this time. We are staying home when we might have gone out, we are making effort to keep to social distancing. All this is to protect ourselves and those around us. May this psalm inspire us as we try to be patient with these restrictions, and wait for things to change.

Week 3:Mon

## Psalm 46

Heather Adams

<sup>1</sup> God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.

<sup>2</sup> Therefore we will not fear,  
though the earth should change, though the  
mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

<sup>3</sup> though its waters roar and foam, though  
the mountains tremble with its tumult.

<sup>4</sup> There is a river whose streams make glad  
the city of God,  
the holy habitation of the Most High.

<sup>5</sup> God is in the midst of the city,  
it shall not be moved;

God will help it when the morning dawns.

<sup>6</sup> The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms  
totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.

<sup>7</sup> The Lord of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

<sup>8</sup> Come behold the works of the Lord; see  
what desolations he has brought on the earth.

<sup>9</sup> He makes wars cease to the end of the  
earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters  
the spear; he burns the shields with fire.

<sup>10</sup> *'Be still and know that I am God!  
I am exalted among the nations,  
I am exalted in the earth.'*

<sup>11</sup> The Lord of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

This was one of my favourite psalms as a child. It seems supremely reassuring. God in this psalm is utterly reliable, a fixed point, whatever changes round about. I have mixed feelings about it now. There is certainly reassurance for the people of God in the city of God, but it seems to speak against the other nations around.

I am told that the original context is that Jerusalem was under threat from more powerful and war making nations round about. The psalm reassures those under threat in the city, and speaks against the aggressive nations, telling them to stop their war making.

I worry that these days nations use the Bible from a position of power when they plan to make war and claim God on their side. This is not an appropriate use of the Bible. I think there may be more subtle versions of this that go on in churches and workplaces and families. God doesn't belong to the UK, or the USA (who I mention because they sometimes use this sort of rhetoric) or the Church of England, or St. Matthew's or to my family or to me. He's not OURS in that sense.

I think this psalm provides us with reassurance, but only in so far as we put aside our power and submit to God's will. If we pursue power or aggression we may find it speaking against us. Maybe one of the tasks of prayer is to help us get our own position in the world in perspective.

Week 3:Wed

## Psalm 137

Jill Elston

<sup>1</sup> There we sat down and cried - by the  
rivers of Babylon - as we remembered Zion.

<sup>2</sup> On the willows there we hung our harps,

<sup>3</sup> for it was there that our captors asked us  
for songs and our torturers  
demanded joy from us,

*'Sing us one of the songs about Zion!'*

<sup>4</sup> How are we to sing the song of the LORD  
on foreign soil?

<sup>5</sup> If I forget you, Jerusalem,  
may my right hand cease to function.

<sup>6</sup> May my tongue stick to the roof of my  
mouth if I don't remember you,  
if I don't consider Jerusalem to be more  
important than my highest joy.

<sup>7</sup> Remember the day of Jerusalem's fall, LORD,  
because of the Edomites, who kept saying,  
*'Tear it down!'*

*Tear it right down to its foundations!*

<sup>8</sup> Daughter of Babylon! You devastator!  
How blessed will be the one who  
pays you back for what you have done to us.  
<sup>9</sup> How blessed will be the one  
who seizes your young children  
and pulverizes them against the cliff!

This is a psalm that provokes much comment and often the end of the psalm is not used or spoken about. The final two verses are often the 'elephant in the room' when it comes to psalms.

This is a lament psalm. Lament psalms often have a complaint that is raised with God and after some wrangling and working out the psalmist comes to see God as their hope and begins to give thanks to God. In Psalm 137 the psalmist is feeling vengeful and incredibly hostile towards their enemies. Calling down disaster and payback on the enemies. This is quite common in Old Testament scripture.

There is only a slight glimmer of moving on when in the last two verses the psalmist suggests that God is to be blessed when the Israelites are avenged. What on earth can we learn from this psalm which often offends or makes us feel uncomfortable?

I believe this helps us to see that God wants to know our every thought. Of course, God already knows what we are thinking and feeling but we are to feel close enough to God to share everything. Share those moments with God when you are incandescent with rage, share those moments when someone is winding you up and pressing all your buttons, share those moments with God when you feel hurt abandoned and alone - our sharing with God might not have the prose of a carefully thought out prayer and may have some vivid imagery but God is there to hear, to help you and to heal.

Alternatively, you may remember the beginning of the psalm for the groovy 1970's hit by Boney M - *By the Rivers of Babylon*. Scholars have many theories about the dating of this psalm, and some suggest that it

is a smorgasbord of elements from different dates. What is clear, whether this is a live account or harking back to a previous time, this psalm speaks of an exiled community.

A community that have been forcibly removed from Jerusalem (Zion) their beloved place of worship which has been overrun and destroyed. They are taunted by their oppressors and asked to sing their songs of Zion as a humiliation. However, this is a resolute and faithful group who will not let themselves forget their homeland and their internal compass towards God. We too are in a 'strange land'. We are physically distanced from family and friends and unable to go to our church building for services and fellowship. However, we too can find a way to 'sing the Lord's song in this strange land.'

We can communicate by phone, zoom, email, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, letter and a whole host of other methods. What's in our hearts has not changed. Our compass is pointing Godwards. We can still love and worship our God and care for each other - we just need to be a little bit more creative.

Week 3:Fri

**Psalm 73**

Mike Taylor

<sup>1</sup> Truly God is good to the upright,  
to those who are pure in heart.  
<sup>2</sup> But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled;  
my steps had nearly slipped.  
<sup>3</sup> For I was envious of the arrogant;  
I saw the prosperity of the wicked.  
<sup>4</sup> For they have no pain;  
their bodies are sound and sleek.  
<sup>5</sup> They are not in trouble as others are;  
they are not plagued like other people.  
<sup>6</sup> Therefore pride is their necklace;  
violence covers them like a garment.  
<sup>7</sup> Their eyes swell out with fatness;  
their hearts overflow with follies.  
<sup>8</sup> They scoff and speak with malice;  
loftily they threaten oppression.  
<sup>9</sup> They set their mouths against heaven,  
and their tongues range over the earth.  
<sup>10</sup> Therefore the people turn and praise them,

and find no fault in them.

<sup>11</sup> And they say, 'How can God know?  
*Is there knowledge in the Most High?*'

<sup>12</sup> Such are the wicked;  
always at ease, they increase in riches.

<sup>13</sup> All in vain I have kept my heart clean  
and washed my hands in innocence.

<sup>14</sup> For all day long I have been plagued,  
and am punished every morning.

<sup>15</sup> If I had said, 'I will talk on in this way',  
I would have been untrue  
to the circle of your children.

<sup>16</sup> But when I thought how to understand this,  
it seemed to me a wearisome task,

<sup>17</sup> until I went into the sanctuary of God;  
then I perceived their end.

<sup>18</sup> Truly you set them in slippery places;  
you make them fall to ruin.

<sup>19</sup> How they are destroyed in a moment,  
swept away utterly by terrors!

<sup>20</sup> They are like a dream when one awakes;  
on awaking you despise their phantoms.

<sup>21</sup> When my soul was embittered,  
when I was pricked in heart,

<sup>22</sup> I was stupid and ignorant;  
I was like a brute beast towards you.

<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless I am continually with you;  
you hold my right hand.

<sup>24</sup> You guide me with your counsel, and  
afterwards you will receive me with honour.

<sup>25</sup> Whom have I in heaven but you?  
And there is nothing on earth  
that I desire other than you.

<sup>26</sup> My flesh and my heart may fail,  
but God is the strength of my heart  
and my portion for ever.

<sup>27</sup> Indeed,  
those who are far from you will perish;  
you put an end to those who are false to you.

<sup>28</sup> But for me it is good to be near God;  
I have made the Lord GOD my refuge,  
to tell of all your works.

In this psalm the writer struggles with the injustice in the world. We see vast inequalities; the top banker or chief executive gets paid millions while the care worker is paid a pittance. The rich person gets honour and praise; the poor person is

disregarded. In times of financial hardship it's never the person at the top who suffers. The psalmist can't understand why God allows such things to happen. He has the feeling that his life of honesty and decency has been all sacrifice with no reward.

However as he pours his heart out to God he comes to realise that if he allows himself to be envious of the rich, or to be resentful of them, he is only hurting himself. A longer perspective shows him that what he gains in being a faithful servant of God is worth far more than the fleeting success of the rich and powerful. The understanding which he expresses towards the end of the psalm is similar to the message of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus tells how in God's kingdom the values of this world will be turned upside down. After the anguished thoughts of the first part of the psalm the last few verses are a lovely expression of a calm mind which finds its joy in devotion to God.

Week 4: Mon

## Psalm 96

David Brewster

<sup>1</sup> O sing to the LORD a new song;  
sing to the LORD, all the earth.

<sup>2</sup> Sing to the LORD, bless his name;  
tell of his salvation from day to day.

<sup>3</sup> Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvellous works among all the peoples.

<sup>4</sup> For great is the LORD, and greatly to be  
praised; he is to be revered above all gods.

<sup>5</sup> For all the gods of the peoples are idols,  
but the LORD made the heavens.

<sup>6</sup> Honour and majesty are before him;  
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

<sup>7</sup> Ascribe to the LORD,

O families of the peoples,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

<sup>8</sup> Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;  
bring an offering, and come into his courts.

<sup>9</sup> Worship the LORD in holy splendour;  
tremble before him, all the earth.

<sup>10</sup> Say among the nations, 'The LORD is king!  
*The world is firmly established;  
it shall never be moved.*

*He will judge the peoples with equity.'*

<sup>11</sup> Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

<sup>12</sup> let the field exult, and everything in it.

Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy <sup>13</sup> before the LORD; for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.

For most people, music has great power to stir the emotions. The power to draw out a smile or a tear; to lift flagging spirits; to conjure a feeling of belonging. I am sure that I am not alone in having been transported back to a vivid memory upon hearing only the first few notes of a melody.

With the use of modern technology, I am able to fit music to my mood. If I'm feeling tired, I can play some lively rock anthems; if I'm feeling nostalgic then I play something from the 80's. Often when we're eating I'll match the music to the food – so far this week we've had Mexican, French and Italian. I'm thinking next week it will be Spanish, and something to evoke Gregg's!

As we reflect upon the Psalms, a mixture of the hymns and prayers of God's old testament people we're reminded of how important singing is in worship. It transports us from our own self obsession to gaze upon the one who can be trusted with all our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, the present and the future.

Whilst we're not able to join together for the foreseeable future, that does not mean that our voices should lay dormant for the period. As the government encourages us to do our daily exercise, so the Psalms encourage us to exercise our vocal chords. So either by the use of the internet (the playlists on our YouTube channel might be a good place to start), the telephone (0800 804 8044), cd or possibly record or tape spend some time each day in opening your heart to God in song, and see how it lifts your soul.

<sup>1</sup> O praise the Lord, all ye nations:  
praise him, all ye people.

<sup>2</sup> For his merciful kindness is great toward us:  
and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever.

Praise ye the Lord.

*King James Version*

<sup>1-2</sup> Praise God, everybody!

Applaud God, all people!

His love has taken over our lives;

God's faithful ways are eternal.

Hallelujah! *The Message*

Famous in the world of psalms for being the shortest psalm with only two verses. However, we can still dig deep and meditate and ruminate on this psalm. The first verse encourages 'all people' or 'everybody' to praise God. I often think when I am studying or praying alone who is this 'everybody' that is talked about. I don't feel like 'all people' while I am stuck here at home. It's time to be a time traveller at this point! We need to remember that we are part of a big family which stretches across the globe and through time. We are not only part of the huge Christian family across the world but part of the Christian family through the ages. Imagine, as you are praying the psalm of the day, that you are not alone - perhaps someone in our great Christian family across the world is praying the psalm at the same time. You could be joining with Katie in Romiley or George in Tanzania (both friends of mine).

We are also part of a much larger history. As Paul tells us in Romans 15 the Good News was for all, Jews and Gentiles (that's us). We are part of the people of God who have been chanting the psalms way back to the time before Jesus took on human flesh. These are psalms Jesus would have learnt in his Jewish family and at the synagogue. We are **all** to praise the Lord. So, remember you may feel you are alone at home giving thanks and praise - but you are not - your voice is joining those of God's people all over the globe and through space and time.

<sup>1</sup> The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;

<sup>3</sup> he restores my soul. He leads me  
in right paths for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup> Even though I walk  
through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff- they comfort me.

<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
my whole life long.

This best known of all the psalms has become part of British culture, along with God save the Queen, We'll meet again, and You'll never walk alone. We know it in so many different forms: "The Lord's my Shepherd", often sung at funerals; "The King of love my shepherd is", which was a one time regular in school assemblies; and even the version used for the Vicar of Dibley theme tune. This last one we sang as a choir item at David Brewster's induction at St Mark's when he first came to Stockport - I think we suggested it as a joke, but he was keen we sing it, so we did.

The psalm has been used in so many ways, particularly in times of personal or national peril or grief. It speaks to every sense of loss and lack, promising that those who have God as their shepherd shall not be without.

Amidst so many questions faced by country as we consider how to come out of this time of crisis, the psalmist reminds us of some important questions we must answer as we travel through life. Who are you following? Who do you ultimately look to for your welfare? With the psalmist, we can say, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want".