

Psalm 71

In you, O Lord, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.
In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
incline your ear to me and save me.
Be to me a rock of refuge,
a strong fortress, to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress....
I will hope continually,
and will praise you yet more and more.

Prayer:

Loving and Almighty God Present with us now and throughout our lives
When we feel you near,
when we long to know your presence
and when we turn away from you or forget you,
open our eyes to see you glory,
our ears to hear your word of love and hope
and our hearts to receive your love and peace
open our lips to sing your glory
our hands to do your will
and our hearts to live in your love
For you, O Lord are our rock and our fortress
in you we will hope continually and we will praise you ever more.
Amen

**All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he
guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown,
he alone
calls my heart to be his own.**

**Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray our trust;
what with care and toil we fashion,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power,
hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.**

**God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom passing thought;
splendour, light, and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of nought.
Evermore
from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.**

**Daily doth the almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;
his desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand
at his hand;
joy doth wait on his command.**

**Still from man to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call
one and all
ye who follow shall not fall.**

Robert Bridges (1844–1930) (alt.) based on Joachim Neander (1650–1680)

The story so far...

Yesterday we focussed on the story of Mary anointing Jesus and Judas' response. That passage had been preceded by the comments of the chief priests and the pharisees following the raising of Lazarus and is immediately followed by the Gospel's account of Jesus entering Jerusalem.

In John's Gospel the entry into Jerusalem seems far more regal than the other Gospels. The crowds come because they have heard that Lazarus has been brought back from the grave. Have they come to see a miracle? Could some of them be looking more for Lazarus than for Jesus? The Gospel's telling of the events of Palm Sunday is sparse: a statement of what happened and a brief scripture quote.

The paragraph that follows takes as much space as the event itself. In it we hear of the disciples' initial lack of understanding of what it all might mean, the crowd's testimony and search for a sign and a chilling echo of the scribes' and pharisees' comments after the raising of Lazarus. Then John writes

"So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, 'What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.'

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.'"

Now a chapter later the pharisees say

'You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!'

Today's passage follows on immediately.

John 12:20-36; 44-50

Mary's thoughts

The fanfares echo
the coronation is complete
but not complete
Jesus seems himself
but not himself
I fear we are losing him

we stand
observers
as his new court
receives its first ambassadors
and he makes his acceptance speech
we expect humility
the speeches of old
or defiance
a challenge to injustice and death

But he, in glory
embraces death
welcomes it
calls us to join him
and in that welcoming of death
comes glory
the heavenly fanfare
affirming
and majestic

I stand
feeling the distance between us grow
knowing it's becoming uncrossable
as he talks of death and life
of losing and gaining
of light and darkness
why does it feel as though the loss is all?

And so we have the beginning of a coronation that will end on the cross. In John's Gospel this passage seems to combine the declaration of the glory of God in Jesus with the struggle seen in Gethsemane in the other Gospels. Central to that struggle is the need to empty himself of all but love:

"Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground..."

In all this, the light that shines in the darkness and is not overcome continues to shed its beams and to show the way.

And so we are led into that way, the way of love.

**In the Lord I'll be ever thankful,
in the Lord I will rejoice!
Look to God, do not be afraid;
lift up your voices, the Lord is near;
lift up your voices, the Lord is near.**
Taize Community

Prayers:

"Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

Imagine you are holding a seed. It may be very beautiful or it may be wrinkled and gnarled. It may be large or small, colourful or beige. But it contains precious life within it.

You may be tempted to hold on to it: maybe you don't want to waste it, maybe you enjoy its colours or the feel of it in your hand.

And yet, if you continue to hold on to it, it will remain a seed. Planted, the seed will be destroyed. Its casing will burst open and degrade. But it will grow slowly and secretly producing leaves, flowers, fruit and eventually more seed.

In our prayers now think of the things that you hold tightly to, the parts of your life you stockpile or protect scared of using them up or damaging them, worried maybe that others won't recognise their beauty or their worth.

If you can allow God to hold them with you and to help you plant them so that they can bear fruit.

Loving God,
In you there is strength for today and hope for tomorrow.
Receive all that we are and all that we have to offer
those things we give willingly and the things we give reluctantly or hesitatingly
and through them create and recreate for your glory and the abundant life of your creation.
We hold before you all those we would long to hold close at this time,
those we worry about, love and care for.
We hold before you those who give of their time, energy and so much more each day in
the NHS, the emergency services, in care work, in our shops and so much more.
We hold before you those who hold power and those who feel powerless.
Loving God, receive our prayers and help us to trust in you.
This we ask in the name of Christ who taught us when we pray to say
**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come;
thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.
Amen.**

The Blessing

**Come down, O Love divine,
seek thou this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own ardour glowing;
O Comforter, draw near,
within my heart appear,
and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.**

**O let it freely burn,
till earthly passions turn
to dust and ashes, in its heat consuming;
and let thy glorious light
shine ever on my sight,
and clothe me round, the while my path illuming.**

**Let holy charity
mine outward vesture be,
and lowliness become mine inner clothing;
true lowliness of heart,
which takes the humbler part,
and o'er its own shortcomings weeps with loathing.**

**And so the yearning strong,
with which the soul will long,
shall far outpass the power of human telling;
for none can guess its grace,
till he become the place
wherein the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling.**

*Bianco da Siena (d. 1434) translated by Richard Frederick Littledale (1833–1890)
Methodist Church. Singing the Faith (). Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd. Kindle Edition.*