

“I’VE GOT THE BLUES, BUT ...”

Psalm 13

Over these summer Sunday mornings we’ve been dipping into the Psalms for our reflections each week. Last week Gary talked to us about dealing with stress from *Psalm 46* and we’re going to spend just a few moments considering *Psalm 13* this week. It’s appropriate that we look into the Psalms on this Sunday – our Jazz service – as the *Book of Psalms* is really God’s song book. It’s been used by God’s people over the centuries as a source of material for songs in all kinds of idioms and the original were sung in Hebrew by crowds at festivals and by individuals who needed to give expression to their emotions.

There’s a whole range of themes expressed in the 150 songs that make up the book – praise, worship, wonder, gratitude, thanksgiving – and for many people the book is really all about praising God, so much so that some of them are included in the daily services in the Prayer Book and other worship resources. But they are by no means all upbeat. Many of the Psalms – probably far more than many of us realise – are full of questions, confusion, anger and despair – again, very appropriate for this service as they are very much like the Blues.

The Psalm we’ve heard today – *Psalm 13* – is a good example. The singer-songwriter here is King David, the greatest of Israel’s early kings, who we know played the harp and loved making music. But in this song he just can’t seem to get a grasp of what’s going on in his life. “*How long?*” he asks. When is this situation he finds himself in going to be resolved? Why is he having to put up with this? And why does it seem as if God has forgotten him? We know from other sources that David had some pretty horrible experiences in his life and he struggled with all sorts of opposition and oppression – not least, we would probably say today, mental and emotional issues. So he shouts out his complaint to God.

That’s where the Blues started, too. Mixing the rhythms and music of their native Africa with the melodies of the New World, the slaves cried out to God in the despair and hopelessness of their situation, asking for his help, his patience, his protection. As time went by and the songs became more secularised, so they became litanies of regret and sadness: “My woman’s left me”, “My life is heading downhill”, “Everything is going wrong”.

And, although we may not express in in song, for many of us life is like that. We’re struggling. Things aren’t going as we’d like them to. We can’t see an end to our situation. How long have we got to put up with this – even with the effects of this pandemic? Gary, as I say, said a bit about this last week and linked this to the stress that so many of us feel. Maybe you’ve come in like that today – something has happened in your life that is making you think as David does here, something to do with a relationship, your job, your

health, your finances – and inwardly you want to scream with David, “*How long, O Lord? Why are you doing this to me?*”

And then, right at the end, there’s this big “*But*”. We’ve noted this many times before, but the Bible is full of bog “*But*”s. The situation which really describes the human condition, the experiences we all seem to have to go through as a result of our broken humanity, is set out and we can all identify with it, and then the writers and preachers of the Bible – be they David, Isaiah, St Paul or Jesus himself – subvert our thinking and move us in an unexpected direction. Again, it’s a bit like the rhythms and chords and cadences of jazz, which seem all over the place and are then resolved. In this Psalm, the darkness and despair of David’s life is suddenly subverted by the amazing turnaround of the last couple of verses:

*But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing the Lord’s praise,
for he has been good to me.*

Somehow, in all his trouble, David expresses his belief in God’s unfailing love. He is convinced that there will be resolution, that there will be an end to his difficulty. And he knows that because he has seen it happen before. This isn’t the first time he’s had to cope with this kind of stuff and it has worked out in the past – “*he has been good to me*”. Drawing on the memory of times when God has helped him in the past can sustain him in the present and help him in the future.

However far we may think we have sunk, however difficult things might seem for us at the moment, we can all look back to better times and easier situations that can give us hope for the future. It doesn’t have to be this way. There is an alternative. David sings here that he can “*rejoice in [God’s] salvation*”. God can and has saved him from such problems and he will never forget David, however much it might seem like it at the moment.

Centuries after this Psalm was written, God did something that would make that salvation a reality for us all. As he watched humanity struggling with the effects and consequences of evil in the world we had created to be so good, God decided to do something about it and sent Jesus among us to make a difference, to offer a new way of looking at things, to show us an alternative. And to show just how serious he was about changing things for us, Jesus gave up his life as he was executed on the cross, then burst out of the tomb to demonstrate that even death should not worry us any more.

The despair and darkness of the Blues are resolved into a new way of looking at things. Again, as Gary said last week, the problems don’t go away, but we’re given the resources and the hope to deal with them, together with the help of God. If you can bring yourself to say with David, “*I trust in your unfailing love*”, then here is hope for you. And never be afraid to cry out to God, who hears your questions and sees your

anguish. He's there for you, if only you'll reach out for him. If you'd like to know a bit more about that, don't go away from here today without speaking to someone about it – have a word with me or talk to someone you know who is a Christian. And let's reflect on that as we hear a piece of music from the band – an instrumental version of Horatio Spafford's hymn *It is well with my soul*.