

Notes on Psalm 147 'Hymn of Praise'

The first and last words of this Psalm tell you outright the heart and soul of this Psalm. The word is Hallelujah, and it is important that we ask why the Psalmist chooses to use it. Psalms of New Orientation, like Psalms 66 and 91, show the importance of us learning to have a good memory. In verse 3 we are prompted to remember the good, the bad and the ugly and it is important that the bad and the ugly are not whitewashed or forgotten but instead remind us that they have been processed by our experience of our walking through the valley of the shadow of death, to quote from Psalm 23. This processing teaches us that we are not to harbour either a grudge or resentment but instead to remind ourselves that we are now in a new place because we have been healed and made whole by God. This is why we use the word, Hallelujah; it says God has led us through and God has made us whole.

Verse 3 describes for us the journey of healing and recovery which we all need to go through when we have been in times of Disorientation. The Psalmist does not give us a time frame of how long this healing took as described here, instead his focus is purely and simply on God's healing action. Over the last 12 months I, and we, have all experienced a significant level of Disorientation within our own lives and in the life of the church. When I began to ask the question, purely of myself, of what the future shape of my ministry might look like here I never imagined the level of Disorientation we would all experience and neither did I anticipate the good place we are in now. In many senses I am glad that I did not know as I think I may well have avoided this pain but looking back I can see God's hand in all of this. I can see God refreshing and renewing our vision as a church that we might 'Do Life Together' and also in our own individual lives and how we love and follow him anew. I can also sense that now is the time for us to know God's hand of healing on us all as this is what we need.

When I think of myself, I have come to realise that God is nudging me to enter into a time of rest, in other words to take a sabbatical which will last for approximately three months. During this sabbatical I will primarily enter into a time of healing and counselling that I may be truly helped to enter fully myself into this time of New Orientation we are now in. I am meeting a counsellor in January to help me plan and work out this process and I am planning to go on sabbatical after Easter. This time away is for my own good but it is also for your own good too. I would like you to see it an opportunity for you to listen and dare to take steps in faith so that

when I return, I may see how much the church has changed because we are all daring to follow the way in which Jesus is leading us.

You may be concerned that so far, I have only spoken on and about verse 3 and there are 20 verses in the whole Psalm, but don't panic!! The rest of the Psalm after verse 3, verses 4 – 20, remind us that a time of New Orientation is to be a time marked by praise and thanksgiving, and Psalm 147 is certainly full of that!! It is a sustained testimony of the different ways this person, but also us who read and listen to it, have known God's healing and loving touch in their lives which is marked by a sense of awe and wonder as we realise that he is everywhere and that we can discover his love in all things.

I have been in school for most of last week and part of this week too. When I am with Year 6 my heart for the workshop is that they may realise just how awesome and wonderful the story of the birth of and who this baby really is. In all honesty I am not sure if I persuaded had them so, but I hope that for us all we may approach the manger knowing such emotions. And may we also realise that this baby and the man he grew up to be is the place where all of us can find a New Orientation in God because in him we know God's healing, God's wholeness and God's love. This is what the communion table is saying to us and may we receive these elements with the same joy, wonder and amazement as shepherds did when they knelt before the manger and saw the baby there.