

Notes on Psalm 66 'Thanksgiving songs of the Community'

Today is the first Sunday of Advent and we are all aware that the countdown has started; it is after all, only three weeks until Christmas. But, as ever, the shops have beaten us to the punch, by about three months, but our countdown I think has a very different feel to it. Our exuberance, joy and festivities celebrate the gift given for us that we may be reminded of and rooted more in God's plans and purposes for all of creation and God's astonishing intent to save. This Psalm, and the ones like it, delight in this only too well, as well as the turn of the wheel we are very familiar with and which this Psalm wants us to know more and more.

Over these last few weeks, we have seen pictures of both Israeli and Palestinian hostages and prisoners being exchanged and I can imagine Psalm 66 being the sort of Psalm that would be sung as they were welcomed home. This sense of extravagant joy and exuberance is something for us all, as what this Psalm describes here is for us all to enter into and live out within our lives; we are not to be tempted to think of this as something only for others. We return to our familiar spiral of knowing Jesus and the four psalms of Disorientation we have looked at describe why it is such an apt word. When we looked at Psalm 88, we thought about the experience of God's absence from our lives and situations. We considered in Psalm 70 how often our lives are so easily overwhelmed by fears, worries and anxieties. In Psalm 32 we recognise the reality of sin within our lives and how often this pushes us deeper into the mire forgetting that our God is always quick to forgive. Finally, in Psalm 23, we read about the harsh reality of walking through the valley of the shadow of death which is not only of experiencing the death of someone we love, but also those times when something dies within us. In all of these Psalms we know the temptation is to deny the reality of being Disorientated in our lives imagining it is an example of unbelief. Instead, we are to realise that being Disorientated is how God often leads us that we may learn to trust him more.

Psalm 66 celebrates, it shouts out, it rejoices in the truth that Jesus is bigger than all of these disorientating situations. Read verses 1 - 4 and realise that what he says here is truly and fully true for each and every one of us. There are no exceptions to what the Psalmist is describing! The Psalm draws our hearts, our minds and our soul back to the story and events of the Exodus to illustrate and explain why we are able to move into a New Orientation. In the Psalm we are drawn into this story of Israel being enslaved, of God seemingly being deaf to his people's cries, of the awful reality of genocide and the despotic rule of Pharaoh. The question is that wondering if it can get any worse, but then Exodus 2 verse 24 erupts into the situation. Suddenly, and without warning, we are told that God has heard, that God has remembered, that God has seen and that God knows and he shows this by sending Moses.

The New Orientation is built on the truth that God has really and truly done this, that he really and truly does do this sort of thing and that he will do this again and again and again because God is faithful. The Psalmist draws his readers into the ancient story of Israel, but we are to be drawn into the old, old story of the New Exodus, of Jesus' death and resurrection. We are drawn to the cross where we hear Jesus' cry of *tetelestai*, it is finished, in John 19 verse 30 but then we are immediately pointed to John 20 verse 1 where it says, 'On the first day of the week' and these two sayings tell

us that the old is gone and the new has come. As we read, ponder and remember this story we are prompted to remember the truth that God has really and truly done this sort of thing, that he really and truly does do this sort of thing and that he will do this again and again and again because God is faithful.

The end result is, as Richard Mattison and Gill Smith said, the joy of testimony and like in verses 16 – 20, like Richard and Gill we are literally standing in a brand new place. When we have journeyed through these three elements we are not the same as we were before this. This is because Jesus has been at work in your life, in my life, in our lives and when Jesus is at work so nothing stays the same. It is the lie of the enemy who says that nothing changes and neither do you but this is not true because Jesus, when we read the Gospels, has shown us otherwise.

The joy of the Advent season is to remind us that we're all on untrod ground even if our decorations may show some wear and tear. We are not to be rearview mirror Christians who are always looking behind us, instead we are to look ahead. We are to celebrate the Jesus who came but our prayer is the cry of '*maranatha*', or 'Come Lord Jesus'. Psalm 66 says to all of us look ahead because we are all treading on the untrod ground of knowing afresh that Jesus is faithful, that he is reliable and that he is dependable. But this is so hard at times to believe. In verses 10 - 12 the Psalmist has looked back and what he sees is how Jesus had taught him how to believe and may we so learn how to do this that we might as a church be those who look ahead to see the new thing Jesus is doing is among us.

Questions Psalm 66 'Thanksgiving songs of the Community'

- 1 We return to the familiar diagram and what to you is the predominant emotion of Psalm 66 and why is this?
- 2 When we thought of the Psalms of Disorientation, which of the four we used connected with you the most deeply and why?
- 3 In verses 1 – 4 what do you find most encouraging and why?
- 4 What role does the memory of the Exodus play in this Psalm, why is Exodus 2 verse 24 so important to it and why were they to remember this?
- 5 As Christians instead of the Exodus we are drawn to Jesus' cross and resurrection and so why are we to read, ponder and remember it?
- 6 When we enter a time of New Orientation, why are we truly standing in a brand new place?
- 7 What is the enemy's lie here and why is it wrong?
- 8 What is wrong in being a 'rear view mirror Christian' and what do verses 10 – 12 say to us here?