

PSALM 51 verses 1 – 13

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.

² Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.

⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

⁶ Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.

JOHN 12 verses 20-36

²⁰ Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. 'Sir,' they said, 'we would like to see Jesus.' ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

²³ Jesus replied, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.

²⁷ 'Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour"? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.' ²⁹ The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

³⁰ Jesus said, 'This voice was for your benefit, not mine. ³¹ Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up[□] from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' ³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

³⁴ The crowd spoke up, 'We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain for ever, so how can you say, "The Son of Man must be lifted up"? Who is this "Son of Man"?''

³⁵ Then Jesus told them, 'You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. ³⁶ Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.' When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

“WE WANT TO SEE JESUS”

READING: *John 12 verses 20-33*

Is there anything you particularly want to see? Perhaps it is some part of the world which you have seen on television, read about or heard about. Like many people, I would like to see the Northern Lights, and it seems that if you can time it right and the conditions are right, then the far north coast of Ireland, or Scotland can give you that experience without having to travel to the Arctic regions. I would love to see the red sandstone city of ancient Petra, but the weather might be just a little too hot. For some, just to be able to see their family once again when lockdown restrictions are over and maybe able to hold and hug them once again. The more spiritual, which I am sure includes us all, will be looking forward to the day when they see Jesus face to face. It has now been over a year of storms and pandemic, of fear, of sadness, of lockdowns and frustration. It has been a year when more than once it will have been said “where is God in all of this?” It is not a new question and has been asked since time immemorial, and no doubt will continue to be asked until time ends. Out of curiosity, I looked up Google and typed in the question “where is your God?” which produced 465,000 results.

In our reading today, we read that some Greeks come to Philip, possibly because Philip is a Greek name even though he is Jewish, and they ask to meet or to see Jesus. We don’t know anything more about them or even if they actually saw him, or why they actually wanted to see him in the first place. But they come, asking Philip to introduce them to Christ Jesus. John tells us that Philip goes to his brother Andrew and that together they go to Jesus and tell him that there are some Greeks wanting to meet him. Jesus’s reply recorded from **verse 23** is a strange one. Some men have obviously travelled a great distance to speak with him and he says **‘the hour has now come.’** What was Jesus talking about? If we look back to the wedding in Cana in Galilee as recorded in **John chapter 2**, in **verse 4**, Jesus’s response when his mother requests he do something because the wine has run out was **‘My hour has not yet come.’** But now by **chapter 12** the ‘hour’ has come. But what was this hour? Well, the answer to that is found in the remaining verses of our passage this morning.

Verse 24, using the analogy of a grain of wheat Jesus speaks about death and about life coming out of and from death. Earlier in his ministry, Jesus told the parable of the Sower, later explaining its meaning to his disciples. He explained how the seed was the Word of God and how it entered all sorts of soil with mixed results. We know from **John chapter 1** that Jesus is the Word of God made flesh and he is the seed which now will die so that through the resurrection new life might be available to humanity. Jesus says that the seed must die, be buried in the ground and die so that new life, abundant fruit might come forth. He says that the seed must lose its own identity, its own life, in order for the plant to grow and bear fruit in abundance.

In **verses 25-26** Jesus moves then to say that his disciples, those who would follow him, must die to self in order to gain life, eternal life. Self is at the heart of all sin; self-love, self-centredness, refusing to acknowledge the sovereignty of God and relying on self, not God, for life. Jesus says therefore that if you are going to be a follower of his you had better follow his example. But what was that example? It was the way of the cross. The denial of self and the obedience to and of the Father’s will, even unto death. The result of following his example is that we will receive eternal life. Jesus says his followers will be where he is and where he is, is glory, the glory that the Father bestowed on him as the Son of God who died, rose victorious and ascended on high to the his right hand. To be where Jesus is is to receive glory from the Father but it can only be gained by way of the cross.

Jesus goes on to speak of the anguish of his soul at the prospect of death in **verses 27-30**. Here is the battle which has raged in the heart and soul of the saviour from the moment of his birth. Here is the battle which Satan tempted him with in the wilderness, to go another way other than the cross. Jesus’ humanity is horrified at the prospect of death but his desire to obey the Father’s

will leads him humbly to pray that his Father would be glorified. But how? The Father is glorified when his Son obeys him, right to Calvary. Jesus has now turned to the journey before him. A journey which will take him via Gethsemane to Calvary to the tomb, resurrection and ascension to the Father's right hand in glory. Christ says to the disciples and to the Greeks who came to see him – life, eternal life comes only through death. He knows he is now approaching fulfilment of his purpose in coming to this world. He knows the hour of his death is at hand. He knows that Judas will betray him. He knows Simon deny him. He knows that these 12 men who have shared his life for the past three years will all desert him at the hour of his death. Such thoughts terrorise his mind and yet he prays Father be glorified! As he spoke these words God the Father answered the prayer of God the Son with assurance that he was fulfilling the will of the Father and bringing salvation to a sinful humanity.

Jesus explains in **verses 31-33**, what he means by the hour has come. Jesus says to the disciples 'I am going to be lifted up', indicating that crucifixion beckoned, but it meant much more than execution. The Greek language of John's Gospel translates the sense of not only being lifted up on a cross but of being lifted up in glory. The death of Christ was to be the glorification of Christ; his death would also be the judgement and defeat of Satan. What Satan would see as his triumph would in fact be his defeat. The cross which would appear to all as Jesus defeated would, in fact, be the very gateway to eternal life humanity. Sin sends Jesus to the cross, yet by the cross sin is defeated. The glory of salvation is fully displayed in the shame of the cross. The result of his being lifted up is that he will draw all men unto himself, and through it they are drawn into the presence of God the Father and presented spotless, without sin or shame, before him.

The Greeks wanted to see Jesus, but Jesus wanted them to see his true purposes, to experience life abundant, life eternal. Christ did not come to merely give us a knowledge of God, even though there is nothing better than knowing God. Christ did not come to merely bring us a new experience of God, though there is nothing more life changing than meeting God. Christ did not come to merely exhort us to do good works even though he said we would be known by our works. Jesus came to give us life and life abundantly.

In his book "Night" part of a trilogy about the holocaust, Dr Elie Wiesel writes: "One day, as we returned from work, we saw three gallows, three black ravens, erected on the Appelplatz. Roll call. The SS surrounding us, machine guns aimed at us: the usual ritual. Three prisoners in chains and, among them, the little pipel, the sad-eyed angel. The SS seemed more preoccupied, more worried, than usual. To hang a child in front of thousands of onlookers was not a small matter. The head of the camp read the verdict. All eyes were on the child. He was pale, almost calm, but he was biting his lips as he stood in the shadow of the gallows. This time, the Lagerkapo refused to act as executioner. Three SS took his place. The three condemned prisoners together stepped onto the chairs. In unison, the nooses were placed around their necks. "Long live liberty!" shouted the two men. But the boy was silent. "Where is merciful God, where is He?" someone behind me was asking. At the signal, the three chairs were tipped over. Total silence in the camp. On the horizon, the sun was setting. "Caps off!" screamed the Lageralteste. His voice quivered. As for the rest of us, we were weeping. "Cover your heads!" Then came the march past the victims. The two men were no longer alive. Their tongues were hanging out, swollen and bluish. But the third rope was still moving: the child, too light, was still breathing.. And so he remained for more than half an hour, lingering between life and death, writhing before our eyes. And we were forced to look at him at close range. He was still alive when I passed him. His tongue was still red, his eyes not yet extinguished. Behind me, I heard the same man asking: "For God's sake, where is God?" And from within me, I heard a voice answer: "Where is He? This is where – hanging here from this gallows..."

In the floods, in the storms, in the pandemic, in the lockdowns, in the suffering and loss, "where is God?" has often been asked. He is there in the midst of it all. He is there in the many acts of love and community spirit. He is there comforting the bereaved, holding and healing the hurting. He is there in the lives and actions of all those who care for others with no self-centred thought of themselves – the hospitals, in the care homes, in the community, in the shops and stores, in the

schools, in the funeral homes, in so many places – GOD IS THERE. We want to see Jesus? Open our eyes and amidst the horror and pain of what is going on in this world, He is there.

At the start of this, I mentioned the questions and phrases I had typed into Google search and of the results. I also typed in the phrase “here is your God / God is here” and this produced 94.4 million results, and also “we want to see Jesus” giving 1.6 million results. I wonder if these results speak for themselves?

“Where is God?”

Where is God?
When it hurts
When my best
Becomes my worse
When I fail my test
And to join the rest

Where is God?
When those I love
Return Hatred instead
When a widow
Looses her only son

Where is God
When the man she loves
Out of the house has walked
Leaving her with kids
And all the bills
To pay

Where is God?
When one’s heart gets broken
And all the joy is taken
Has He His own forgotten?
Or has He forsaken
Man that He did make

Where is God?
When those that commit crimes
Go with impunity at times

Evil has come to town
All that’s good is down
The Rich are getting richer
The poor are getting poorer
The schools are getting empty
Moral is now just scanty

God is standing right there
Feeling the pains with you
God is standing right there
Waiting for all who come
He never slumbers,
He never sleeps
He’s waiting your soul to keep

Don’t be fooled,
don’t be tricked
God is standing right there
Watching and waiting for you

J.Lakie Kollie, Jr.