

So we are “in exile”! No Church Services, no Housegroups, no fellowship, no meeting together; we seem to be on our own in a very uncertain world. Thinking about these things it may be worth looking at the way the people of God managed to continue faithful in times of uncertainty – in many cases with things far more stressful than the latest epidemic.

The best remembered time of exile was obviously after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in August 586 B.C. For those taken away from everything with which they were familiar, it seemed that the God in whom their fathers had trusted, had abandoned them!

As things are at present, it appears that human civilization is so very fragile! The more “inter-connected” we have become, the more vulnerable we are to global events like a pandemic.

At present we are so much better off than other areas of the world. The locust swarms in Africa and Pakistan have all but disappeared from the news.

We are in exile BUT we are not alone! During the next few weeks I suggest looking at some characters who faced up to exile and the different ways that they coped with the lack of a physical “Temple” as a sign of the Lord’s presence with them.

This week though, I have been reading Psalm 42 43, and it seems like a good place to start.

READ PSALM 42 – 43

Obviously written by someone deeply involved in worship in the Temple in Jerusalem. Possibly king David when he fled from Absalom’s rebellion – see 2 Samuel chapter 15 beginning at verse 13. For those of us who have been involved in Sunday worship for many years the sudden deprecation of Holy Communion, Fellowship, Prayer and Praise comes as a culture shock, along with everything else that is happening around us.

Verses 1 – 3: How far have we been reduced to simply calling on the Lord God in prayer? It appears that everything is out of our control and it seems doubtful if anyone knows what the outcome will be.

All we can do is pray with the psalmist, longing and thirsting for His presence.

Verses 4 – 6a: Think back to a wonderful service of worship. Easter Day Communion, with music group, choir, organ praising the Lord – singing “Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son; endless is the victory thou o’er death hast won”.

It will happen again! Here or hereafter! With the psalmist we can “Hope in God: for I shall again praise Him, my help and my God.”

Verses 6b – 8: Be encouraged! Spiritual mood swings are perfectly normal in our lives. Here even though the psalmist feels that he is drowning, he recognises that God’s hand is still holding him and that the steadfast love of the Lord is always with him.

Verses 9 – 11: The oppression of the daily news can be like a deadly wound. Festering under the surface, coming back to haunt us when maybe we least expect it. The answer comes again and again in the “chorus”. Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, my help and my God.

Psalm 43: is a continuation of 42, there is no natural break between them.

It brings back memories of my time as assistant curate of Dawlish, immediately after my ordination. This psalm was used as a preparation with the server, in the clergy vestry before early morning Holy Communion. Verses 1 – 2: Begins with a direct prayer to God. A recognition that things are not as they should

be. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble – but – it does seem sometimes that He is no longer there, or that He does not care! At least the psalmist is honest!! An “evangelical smile” might work for a time, but when reality bites, then is the time to be honest with the Lord God. The Elijah complex - “I, even I only am left, and they seek my life to take it away” can feel like we have hit a spiritual brick wall.

Verses 3 – 4: The answer is again, in prayer – seeking God’s light and truth in the present darkness. The words of our Lord Jesus may be appropriate here: “Fear not little flock, for it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

Verse 5: Again the chorus! Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my help and my God.
In our longing for Church worship to be resumed, and to be able to meet and share together in fellowship, prayer and praise, never forget that what we have now on earth is only a weak reminder of what will be ours in heavenly worship.
Terry Brighton 25 / 3 / 20