

"How long, O Lord ?" Words at the beginning of Psalm 13.

As has been said so often, "2020 has been a year like no other."

I don't need to labour the point by listing the things that have troubled the world over the past 12 months and more.

Things that are still troubling many parts of the world. And while we have often counted ourselves very fortunate to be living in our beautiful and relatively safe part of the world, that's not to say that you and I haven't had, and may still have, issues that are hard to bear.

God's people down the centuries have not been protected from such things.

Life for Noah in the days of the big flood, for example. And the Israelites and their life Egypt under Pharaoh, and later their

many tough years in the wilderness. Then think of the prophets of old who for the most part were trying to be faithful to God's calling, and yet were scoffed at and rejected.

Think of the early disciples, and Paul, who were persecuted in all sorts of ways as they tried to spread the good news of Jesus.

And we have to include the Lord Jesus Himself on the list.... going about doing good and spreading words of hope and love. But we know what happened to Him.

Remember the questions the Psalmist

asked : *Ps 13:1 a How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?*

Ps 13:2 How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

He, David the Psalmist, knew what it was to face hard times. And part of his response was to QUESTION GOD.

Have you ever questioned God ? have you ever wondered why, despite living what we might describe as a reasonably decent life, some pretty tough things come our way ? Or it may be you are thinking of somebody else. I think of Neill Dunbar who with his family is serving God in Cambodia. A fair degree of sacrifice involved in leaving your own country and lifestyle to spend some years in a very different and at times difficult country - so that you might play a part in helping folk there to get to know and walk with God. But in recent months both of Neil's parents here in Christchurch died.

WHY ? we might ask, why would God allow such things to happen to such a devoted Christian family ?

And the answer I would give is this : "I don't know."

There are many things that happen that seem so tough and so unfair, and we

wonder why. Yes, for us Christians, who we know are greatly loved by God. It's often a mystery, and a tough mystery at that. Two different relatives of ours, both very convinced Christians, have been going through worrying health issues, supported by plenty of prayer, and to date, no clear answers. Why ? We don't know.

But I guess we must also remember the words in the Letter of James ch.1:

Jas 1:2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

Jas 1:3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

Jas 1:4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything

Well, that's good to know; coping with tough times is part of our growth as believers. But that doesn't make it easy. And let's remember that God through the Bible doesn't promise believers a trouble-free life. It would be nice if He did, but He didn't.

So what we need to find in all this, as the psalmist was asking, is : **WHERE CAN WE FIND SOME HOPE ?** How can we cope ?

Well, let's remember that Hope is not always found in happy endings. But rather it can be found in **JESUS TURNING UP.**

Our Gospel reading tells part of the story of Lazarus. Lazarus had two sisters, Mary & Martha. They lived together in the little village of Bethany. Apparently Jesus was quite a close friend of this family, and would spend time there in Bethany. Anyway, Lazarus became ill, and eventually died, much to the consternation of Mary & Martha. Word came through to Jesus who soon got to be with them. He comforted them of course, and shared tears with them. He gave them the great resurrection words :

, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die;

Jn 11:26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

But I wonder how much that cheered them at the time.

In due course we read of the miraculous raising of Lazarus from the dead - one of the very few such recorded in our Bible.

But we might ask the question : How might things have been for Mary & Martha if Jesus had NOT raised their brother to life ? And of course, for you and me, when we have a concern for a close relative or friend who is sick and then dies, we may have prayed for a recovery, but it doesn't happen, and we are left with our grief.

Do we feel God didn't hear our prayer ? or that our faith isn't big enough ? or that there's been too much in our lives that wouldn't have pleased God ? Have we not deserved God's kind favour ? **WHY** is one prayer answered and not

another - as WE see it ? An age-old question.

Let me return to our 13th Psalm, and to David who is wondering where his God is when things have been tough. Does he give up on God, thinking He doesn't care ? What does he say ?

Ps 13:5 But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.

HOPE is not just found in happy endings, but for you and me, it can be found **WHEN JESUS TURNS UP !**

When we turn our eyes upon Jesus and look full in His wonderful face. When we allow ourselves to bring God into our time of need and trouble.

As somebody has put it :

"Sometimes we discover by God's grace, that the darkness we thought was the shadow of death, is instead the shadow of the Almighty, covering us with His wings."

Mary and Martha were buoyed by Jesus turning up; yes, in this case, before the miraculous raising of Lazarus.

So I believe when we come to the questions : "Where are you, God ? How long, O Lord ?" we need to consciously make a decision to trust God, to ask Him to turn up for us. Yes, even when we feel confused and anxious.

And this includes being open and honest with God. To tell Him we are confused, we don't understand, we don't think it's fair, and all of that. That's okay. Let's remember that our God can cope with all of that ! He understands how we are feeling.

Yes, we can find hope when things are tough. But hope is not so much a feeling, as a decision to turn to God and to trust that He will turn up. Confident that He will never desert us. This amounts to an act of faith.

How are things for you as we begin this new year ? What are the storms or struggles you are coping with ? What questions are on your mind ?

I came on these words in my recent

Bible-reading notes :

LIFE'S STORMS

Life's storms can be very challenging, but God is bigger than all the storms we face. Let us be reminded that God is always there for us, and he promises not to leave us, even in the places where we can't see Him, and in circumstances that we don't fully understand.

Kar Yong Lim (SU Notes 20 June 2020)

In the words of the psalmist : *Ps 13:5 But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.*

Ps 13:6 I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me.

MARION to SING -

1 How long, O Lord, will you forget
an answer to my prayer?
No tokens of your love I see,
your face is turned away from me;
I wrestle with despair.

2 How long, O Lord, will you forsake
and leave me in this way?
When will you come to my relief?
My heart is overwhelmed with grief,
by evil night and day.

3 How long, O Lord - but you forgive,
with mercy from above.
I find that all your ways are just,
I learn to praise you and to trust
in your unfailing love.

AMEN