**New Kilpatrick**

**Podcast**

**13th August 2023**

**Psalm 90**

**Gathering**

Let us pause

And in silence

Find

What words cannot clasp

A moment that holds all time

A place that anchors all places

A presence that is every presence

A sacred space

A holy moment

A place of encounter

Holy because we are here

And God invites

And together we find a dwelling place

Where heaven and earth abide together

Tryst

Tangle

This is that place

We are those people

And God call us

Waits for us

invites us

Into worship

Hello… I’m Roddy Hamilton, the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish and thank you for inviting us into that space where we can worship together… wherever we are… We take a psalm today to worship through… we don’t offer explanation but hopefully an encounter with it… and in encountering the psalm ... we find a meeting place… an ancient meeting place with God…

But that is the nature of psalms… and so we take a few and let them shape the space they have always shaped… for Gods people to meet… nay… encounter… that much deeper word… that presence within us… between us… among us… we call God…

**Scripture Introduction**

We each have a song within us

It is perhaps how we speak most fully to that which is beyond us

It is how the Bible expresses best the connection, the relationship, the presence of God, in our lives

It is the song of the psalms, a book that spills beyond the pages with that title and is found littered throughout the holy story.

On the lips of Moses, Abraham, Hannah, Mary and more

The sacred song we hear today, allegedly, is the oldest in the book, a tradition suggests it was written not by David but by Moses…

It doesn’t matter if that is true or not…

The idea of it being Moses’ psalm, invites us into one of the most ancient ways found to encounter God

Of engaging with God

Bringing who we are in all its honesty for there is no word or emotion we can bring to God

That isn’t already there in the sacred psalms

I’d argue it is God’s most organic and dynamic book

The song is alive

It is still being written

And is most moving and truthful where our humanity

Found in our lament and thanksgiving, despair and joy

Meet God’s holy response

Of patience, anger, grace, and love.

Let our souls sing again

Let our souls find their dwelling place

In the words

The song

The psalm

90

**Scripture: Psalm 90:1-12**

Lord, you have been our dwelling-place[a]  
    in all generations.

**2**

Before the mountains were brought forth,  
    or ever you had formed the earth and the world,  
    from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

**3**

You turn us[b] back to dust,  
    and say, ‘Turn back, you mortals.’

**4**

For a thousand years in your sight  
    are like yesterday when it is past,  
    or like a watch in the night.

**5**

You sweep them away; they are like a dream,  
    like grass that is renewed in the morning;

**6**

in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;  
    in the evening it fades and withers.

**7**

For we are consumed by your anger;  
    by your wrath we are overwhelmed.

**8**

You have set our iniquities before you,  
    our secret sins in the light of your countenance.

**9**

For all our days pass away under your wrath;  
    our years come to an end[c] like a sigh.

**10**

The days of our life are seventy years,  
    or perhaps eighty, if we are strong;  
even then their span[d] is only toil and trouble;  
    they are soon gone, and we fly away.

**11**

Who considers the power of your anger?  
    Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due to you.

**12**

So teach us to count our days  
    that we may gain a wise heart.

**Reflection**

There is a debate in the church at the moment… about what our worship should become…

Should we continue to have sermons… monologues to expand our understanding of holy texts… or should we strive towards a sense of worship that invites us into an encounter with these texts?…

The tradition of the Church of Scotland… that grew into being during the enlightenment… has always been based on learnèd clergy… well educated… In my day two degrees were expected…

Our fore-bearers designed Presbyterian churches so that the only place everyone could see… was the pulpit… where the word of God sat…

Fonts… communion tables… penance stool… were all less important… Taking the enlightenment as our model… we have continued to choose exposition of Scripture as the central part of our worship…

Of course, that is worthy… and central… but we don’t train ministers to the same degree now… those ordained to word and sacrament… are fewer and further between… Our model is singularly disengaging to those beyond the church… We have passed the enlightenment age… ministers are becoming more managers of others being trained locally to lead worship…

And that isn’t a criticism… It is evidence that the model that underpinned the way we engaged with God… and the ways we respond to science and literature and theology and philosophy… is no longer the 16th century model…

For us used to the preach-teach-learn model… we may feel this is cheapening our intellectual response to faith… or just changing what we are familiar with…

But is there an argument that the ground is shifting, and we are finding a style of worship that is closer to an invitation to encounter God… faith… mystery… wonder…

In contemporary culture… we leave a film… a concert… a shopping trip… having encountered… engaged… experienced something…

I’m not suggesting reducing worship down to a shopping mall approach… but there is no denying we are searching more for an experience than a sermon… Even our education is shaped round that… we learn English, and maths and science through experiences… engaging with others… exploration… rather than by rote…

We need a much longer discussion about it… and that is perhaps one of our Think Again topics for the Autumn… worship as an encounter with God…through the art and glass… the music and words… the readings and the silences… the whole experience… Think worship without the explanation…or the sermon…

Which is where we find ourselves with the psalms perhaps… each a means of encountering God… not explaining God… words that are there to wash over us… we don’t need to understand… it is poetry… all of faith is… explanations just bring trouble…

Might explanation be a way of controlling things? … I have often wondered if that is why we explain… as it helps us control God… lose the danger… and the redemption that is real only in the encounter of it…

Not everyone will agree… that’s good… but it is where I am at the moment… and so here are five psalms… each a different experience… we read them and sit with them and wonder if we might invite a deeper encounter with the simple words and music and silence… such that worship simply becomes a dwelling place… a meeting place… a trysting place with God…

**Psalms: Meeting places with God**

When it feels we are walking in the shadow of death

And our souls long

And when we gather in the presence of our enemies

Shepherd us towards pastures green, O Lord,

Our dwelling place after the journey

When we look to the wonder of the heavens

And ask who might care for us in all this vastness

Remind us we are but a breath smaller than the angels.

So when we think ourselves underwhelming and forgotten

May we find our name among the stars: your dwelling place of glory

How long, O Lord? Our painful cry…

How long, O Lord? Our longest question…

In our deepest abandonment of our darkest days

May you find for us a language to raise our doubts

That they are spoken in the dwelling places of heaven

When the swallow finds a home among the temple rafters

Our thirsty souls long vehemently

For if even the swallow has a nest beside your alter

Then indeed we all have a shelter called home

In the peace of your dwelling place

Before us, behind us, beside us, within us,

There is no place we can go and you will not search for us

Even to the ends of earth, of time, of forgiveness.

In such gracious truth, such heavenly love

We find the place, the very place, we, each of us, dwell in you.

**Prayer based on Psalm 90**

Loving God, our dwelling-place

You hold the memory of all we have been

in every one of our ancestors

Before the mountains were brought forth,

Before you imagined creation, the bens and lochs and glens and streams

Before even what was before, your presence brooded.  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Might you turn us back to dust, from whence we came?

Might our arrogance, our explanations, our enlightenment enrage   
that you say, ‘Turn back, you mortals.’

We think we have progressed

We are enlightened

Yet, in truth, we simply have more questions

Climate change

Hunger

Conflict

Our inhumanity: where has enlightenment brought us

We seem so fickle, flimsy, infinitesimal within your great breadth of life

A thousand years in your sight  
are like yesterday when it is past.

Creator,

You cast them away like the morning after a dream

Grass comes in the morning

Renewed and refreshed

By the evening it is dry again

Are we really just an afterthought,

a mayfly, here today gone tomorrow?

Is that how you regard us?

If you keep count of our sins

then we are overwhelmed every moment we fail to grasp you

Yet,

What is it we reach for?  
knowledge or wisdom

You can finish it all with a sigh

One issue of your breath is enough to carry all we understand into oblivion

If this is all there is, we might as well give up on hope now.

Yet we gather in your presence

We seek out a safe place

We long for the encounter of love

The word of life

The spark of light

It is difficult to know which is the greater,

the wrath you show at our lack of wisdom

or the human encounter you long from us

We are caught in a dilemma we cannot answer.

So teach us to count our days  
that we may gain a wise heart.

O Lord, may each day be a holy one,

that we might grasp for the encounter of light,

of hope,

of grace

you have placed within our reach,

and find there

our dwelling place.

**Benediction**