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## **Hope for the future**

There's no doubt that 2020 has been a year full of surprises! For me, one of the most recent has been the extent to which my garden has continued to flourish and provide colour well into November. Yes, there's absolutely a case to be made that that's a direct result of climate change, which is a less than positive development, but at a time when looking for glimmers of light and hope becomes a much more intentional activity, I'm enjoying being able to look out of my kitchen window at a garden still full of colour.

I'm not the first person – and I won't be the last – to reflect on the fact that gardening in autumn and winter is an inherently hopeful activity. Most gardening activity undertaken in the next few weeks will be done with an eye to spring; we're planting bulbs, tending seedlings, doing a bit of tidying, all in the knowledge that we won't reap the obvious benefits of this until February at the very earliest, and in the case of tulips, probably not until April.

But, of course, there are benefits now, too: a lungful of fresh air; a small dose of Vitamin D; a bit of physical exertion; the psychological benefits of knowing that we've done something 'productive'.

Gardening has certainly been one of my 'oxygen mask' activities this year, and even now that it's getting darker and colder I'm trying to be 'disciplined' about spending time in the garden each day, even if it's just for a few minutes. And it's great to know that whatever the negative impacts of COVID-19 – and they have been many and varied – one of the positives for me is that whatever 2021 holds, my garden will look even better next year.

What 'oxygen mask' activities have you been investing a little time and energy in this week? Do drop us a line; we'd love to hear your stories!

Go well!

*Louise, on behalf of the wider Arthur Rank Centre team*

## **Crying out to God for help**

### **Bible reading: Psalm 83:1-4, 9-10, 17-18**

O God, do not be silent! Do not be deaf. Do not be quiet, O God. Don't you hear the uproar of your enemies? Don't you see that your arrogant enemies are rising up? They devise crafty schemes against your people; they conspire against your precious ones. 'Come,' they say, 'let us wipe out Israel as a nation. We will destroy the very memory of its existence.'

Do to them as you did to the Midianites and as you did to Sisera and Jabin at the Kishon River. They were destroyed at Endor, and their decaying corpses fertilized the soil.

Let them be ashamed and terrified forever. Let them die in disgrace. Then they will learn that you alone are called the Lord, that you alone are the Most High, supreme over all the earth.

## Reflection

In America we have just seen a presidential election that has seen voters turn out in numbers not seen for over 100 years. We have seen allegations and threats made as the public went about their right to vote. We saw a President making outrageous comments when the pressure was mounting, so outrageous that the TV companies stopped broadcasting it. Then we saw a man of God standing calmly, not reacting to these allegations; a man showing love and compassion to all and not a man who retaliated or lowered himself to issue personal insults. The COVID-19 virus, the invisible killer, is evil; it is taking and destroying lives. It is a fight of good over bad.

Throughout history there has never been a race of people so persecuted as the Jews. Israel has had its battles, both in ancient and modern times and yet surprisingly, the Jewish people have always managed to prosper. Psalms are an outpouring of praise and worship, but they also include pain, suffering and cries to God for help and freedom from these sufferings.

In this psalm God's chosen people ask God why he keeps silent. They implore him to act and speak, because his nation is suffering and is in great jeopardy. The psalmist asks God not to be a leader who is bold and brave, but to be a leader who they are able to cast their burdens upon, knowing that his eternal power will save them.

The Jewish people didn't hold back in what they said when they describe their adversaries as a hungry pack of dogs, all barking at once. These 'dogs' are arrogant and shout out loud, confident of being victorious, carrying themselves proudly and exalting themselves as if they had already won. But these enemies of Israel were also God's enemies. The adversaries of the church are usually a noisy and a boastful lot, whose pride is a brass which always sounds, and a cymbal which is forever tinkling. They use their wits and get their heads together; to unite as they plan their campaigns; using treachery and cunning in arranging their schemes.

This is a psalm that speaks to the world today, a world where we may often think evil has taken over and mania freely reigns, but of course it hasn't and doesn't. The media has a habit of concentrating on the worst to get a sensational story. Many years ago I was asked if I would write a small editorial for a free paper called the good news newspaper. It shared good news stories and was uplifting. But there has to be a balance in news and views.

This passage from Psalm 83:1-4 is about asking God to step in to help out. During the past four years of President Trump's presidency we have heard him say and seen him do things that we never would have thought possible; some good and some bad. Some have even compared what he has done to historical tyrants. Strong words, I hear you say, but when we listen to the words of the psalmists and then compare what they were saying to what we have seen and heard is there such a difference.

We also never thought it possible that a virus in the 21st century would take the lives of so many people; a virus that seems as virulent as the Black Death or Spanish Flu, especially with the advancement of medical knowledge and research. Then, as now, people cried out to God for help.

Have we asked ourselves how this can be happening? Have people prayed about what has been happening and asked God to intercede? Suddenly the words of the psalmists suddenly become very relevant.

### **Prayer**

Sovereign God, we pray for all countries across the world and especially those involved in choosing a new leader. We pray for those who have had the courage to put themselves forward as potential leaders. May they seek the good of others rather than the good of themselves. Grant to them wisdom, patience, dedication, integrity, vision and humility. We also pray for all situations where wrong seems to be winning through. We pray for those who are suffering loss and illness during COVID-19 and for those families ripped apart by the virus. Lord step in and let the people once again hear your voice. Amen.

### **Response**

- Do we see injustice in situations around us and, if so, what can we do to bring about change for the better?
- How can we give of our time and skills to make a better world?
- Pray for world situations and countries that seem in a precarious situation and for people who are suffering from the effects of COVID-19.

*Revd Chris Blackshaw, Ayrshire Farming Minister, Church of Scotland*