

# PRAYING THE PSALMS

Resources for Sundays, February 16<sup>th</sup> through to April 6<sup>th</sup> 2025

## Introduction

The primary resource for our exploration of 'Worship' – the second element of the Methodist Way of Life – is a course on the Psalms.

The course comprises 8 midweek group sessions, backed by a 50-day reading scheme that, if followed, will take participants through the Book of Psalms.

This set of Sunday-by-Sunday resources supports this engagement by encouraging preachers/worship leaders/stewards to include the psalm for the day within the Sunday service.

We are in 'Year C', and the psalms which appear in the Lectionary for these Sundays are as follows:

|                      |                                      |           |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| Feb 16 <sup>th</sup> | The Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time    | Psalm 1   |
| Feb 23 <sup>rd</sup> | The Seventh Seventh in Ordinary Time | Psalm 37  |
| Mar 2 <sup>nd</sup>  | The Sunday before Lent               | Psalm 99  |
| Mar 9 <sup>th</sup>  | The First Sunday in Lent             | Psalm 91  |
| Mar 16 <sup>th</sup> | The Second Sunday in Lent            | Psalm 27  |
| Mar 23 <sup>rd</sup> | The Third Sunday in Lent             | Psalm 63  |
| Mar 30 <sup>th</sup> | The Fourth Sunday in Lent            | Psalm 32  |
| Apr 6 <sup>th</sup>  | Passion Sunday                       | Psalm 126 |

The following provides some background on each Sunday's psalm and explains how it connects with the Gospel reading for the day. It also offers some suggestions and resources for worship.

## Feb 16<sup>th</sup> Sixth in Ordinary Time Psalm 1 (Singing the Faith 800)

Gospel reading: Luke 6v17-26

### Background to the Psalm

Psalms 1 & 2 form an introduction to the whole Book of Psalms; Psalm 1 sets out the way of the righteous person; and Psalm 2 the calling of the Messiah, God's chosen and anointed one. Psalm 1 begins with a beatitude ('Happy' or 'Blessed' are...) and Psalm 2 concludes with one.

The two psalms serve as an introduction to the key voices that we hear in the Book of Psalms: the psalmist (Israel), the wicked, the king and God.

### Connections with the Gospel reading

Note, firstly, that both readings have beatitudes in them; the psalm encourages us to walk in the way of the Law; the gospel encourages us to walk in the way of Jesus. Next, note that in both cases a stark contrast is set out between the two ways. Luke's version of the beatitudes (compare the more well know text in Matthew 6) makes for uncomfortable reading!

It expresses God's justice as reversing the values of the world. There is a strong resonance with the 'Song of Mary' earlier in the gospel (Luke 1v46-56). Finally, note the assurance of faith that – in the end – God's kingdom will come and God's will be done.

### Suggestions and Resources:

Psalm 1 can be found in Singing the Faith 800.

Use it as printed, with the congregation responding with the bold words.

Here is a prayer to follow it:

Lord Jesus, in you we see what the wisdom and way of God look like:  
It looks like faithfulness in prayer and fellowship and bible reading;  
It looks like honesty and simplicity and goodness;  
It looks like resilience and strength and humility.  
Lord Jesus, help us to walk the way you walked,  
to deepen our roots in you, to bear the fruit of your Spirit,  
and to discover the happiness, the blessedness of following in your way. Amen.

### A Prayer of Intercession:

We pray for those who are poor... thinking of those who are already struggling to pay their bills; those who are in debt; those – whether here or far away – for whom every day is a struggle. And we pray for those who are rich... those who are isolated from the needs of others, those who have become fearful about protecting what they have, those who are happy with the way things are.

Lord, may your kingdom be known:  
**may your kingdom come.**

We pray for those who are hungry... thinking of those who use food banks; of those who are hungry for change; of those who long for a better world. And we pray for those who have more than they need; whose capacity for thankfulness has been numbed, asking that you will open them to the needs and gifts of others, and to the joy of mutual dependence.

Lord, may your kingdom be known:  
**may your kingdom come.**

We pray for those who are weeping; for those who have lost loved ones, for those who fear the worst, for those who feel let down or regretful. And we pray for those who are laughing all the way to the bank; those who are caught up with what they earn and what they own; those who are obsessed by how they appear to others.

Lord, may your kingdom be known:  
**may your kingdom come.**

We pray for those who are persecuted for their faith or identity; killed for converting, imprisoned for worshipping, condemned for being different. And we pray for those of whom all speak well; who dare not speak the truth of who they really are; who remain silent in the face of the persecution of others; who distance themselves from those who are condemned.

Lord, may your kingdom be known among us:  
**may your kingdom come.**

Jesus, our brother and Lord, we thank you that you came down to our level, to lift us up to yours. Keep us humble, make us daily dependent on your grace, live in us by your Spirit, So, Lord, may your kingdom be known among us: **may your kingdom come.**

There are two joyful songs from South Africa which express a commitment to walk in Jesus' way in Singing the Faith: 484 and 775. Use them to joyfully finish worship and leave the Church.

## Feb 23<sup>rd</sup> Seventh in Ordinary Time Psalm 37v1-11, 39-40

Gospel reading: Luke 6v27-38

### Background to the Psalm

This is one of many psalms which is explicitly ascribed to David, who is seen in the Hebrew Bible as fulfilling – as well as any mortal man – the role of the righteous person set out in Psalm 1 and the calling of the chosen king set out in Psalm 2.

Like Psalm 1, this psalm focuses upon God's way; the way of righteousness and wisdom (Ps 37v30). Like Psalm 1, it sets out a clear contrast – and therefore choice - between being a person who walks in God's way and being one who walks in the way of wickedness. Note the repeated reference to God's promise '*to inherit the land*' (starting in v3 but also in v9, 11, 22, 29, 34).

Although '*the land*' had a geographical focus it also carries a sense of God's kingdom (which is of no 'fixed abode').

### Connections with the Gospel reading

The way that Jesus is setting out contrasts with the way of the world: love/hate, bless/curse, violence/non-violence, give/take... This follows on from the passage last week which set out the way of blessedness contrasted with the way of wickedness.

The same contrast is seen in the psalm. The psalm encourages us to remain faithful and continue to act like God (which is what 'righteously' means) even if to others it appears foolish; even if we ourselves begin to wonder about the wisdom of this way...

### Suggestions and Resources

Read it from Pew Bibles, or print out on sheets of paper, with one half of the congregation alternating with the other half. Alternatively, read two verses all together and then sing an Alleluia in between (eg Singing the Faith No 758):

*Alleluia!*

- 1 Do not fret because of those who are evil  
or be envious of those who do wrong;
- 2 for like the grass they will soon wither,  
like green plants they will soon die away.

*Alleluia!*

- 3 Trust in the LORD and do good;  
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.
- 4 Take delight in the LORD,  
and he will give you the desires of your heart.

*Alleluia!*

- 5 Commit your way to the LORD;  
trust in him and he will do this:
- 6 He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,  
your vindication like the noonday sun.

*Alleluia!*

- 7 Be still before the LORD  
and wait patiently for him;  
do not fret when people succeed in their ways,  
when they carry out their wicked schemes.

*Alleluia!*

Words attributed to Mother Theresa:

People are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centred; forgive them anyway.  
If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives; be kind anyway.  
If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies; succeed anyway.  
If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you; be honest and frank anyway.  
What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight; build anyway.  
If you find serenity and happiness, there may be jealousy; be happy anyway.

The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow; do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough; give the world the best you've got anyway. You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and God; it was never between you and them anyway.

## Mar 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday before Lent Psalm 99 (Singing the Faith 821)

Gospel reading: Luke 9v28-36

Background to the Psalm: Psalm 99 is one of a series of psalms which celebrate the new thing that God is doing (Ps 90 – 100); a number of which make specific reference to God as king (Ps 93v1, 95v3, 96v10, 97v1, 98v6 and 99v1).

This psalm draws out the close connection between holiness and justice. Three times, God is declared 'Holy' (v3,5,9); and in verse 4 God is affirmed as a God who loves justice and who sees that it is done.

Connections with the Gospel reading: God is doing a new thing in Jesus, something which will fulfil and surpass what God did through his servants Moses and Elijah (note the use of the word 'departure' or literally 'exodus' in v31). The strong resonance with the story of Moses also connects with God as a lover of justice, especially as expressed in action to set the oppressed free and lift up the poor.

Mountain tops are frequently associated in the bible with holiness, as places of encounter with Godself. The mention of clouds and the nature of Peter's reaction further heighten the sense of an overwhelming encounter with the God who is holy and other. The voice of God at v35 is a reminder of the same voice at Jesus' baptism, and a fulfilment of the words of Psalm 2v7.

Suggestions and Resources: Psalm 99 can be found at Singing the Faith 821, and it is good to use it as it is printed. Alternatively, you could print it out on sheets to enable the congregation to respond with the three expressions of praise:

1 The Lord reigns,  
let the nations tremble;  
he sits enthroned between the cherubim,  
let the earth shake.

2 Great is the Lord in Zion;  
he is exalted over all the nations.

**3 Let us praise your great and awesome name —  
Holy is he!**

4 The King is mighty, he loves justice—  
you have established equity;  
in Jacob you have done  
what is just and right.

**5 Exalt the Lord our God  
and worship at his footstool;  
holy is he!**

6 Moses and Aaron were among his priests,  
Samuel was among those who called on his name;  
they called on the Lord  
and he answered them.

7 He spoke to them from the pillar of cloud;  
they kept his statutes and the decrees he gave them.

8 Lord our God,  
you answered them;  
you were to Israel a forgiving God,  
though you punished their misdeeds.

**9 Exalt the Lord our God  
and worship at his holy mountain,  
for the Lord our God is holy.**

Follow such a reading of the psalm with a worship song like:  
20 Be still for the presence of the Lord, the Holy one is here

Or a hymn like: 11 Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!

Gospel reading: Luke 4v1-13

Background to the Psalm: Psalms 90 and 91 set the new thing which God is doing in Book IV of the psalms in motion. Psalm 90 is the only psalm attributed to Moses and grounds the new thing further back than the experiment of kingship.

It is written in the second person plural ('us' and 'our'), whereas Psalm 91 is personal ('I' and 'my' in verse 2).

This is what it looks like to make the Lord your dwelling place (Ps 90v1 and Ps 91v9). The psalm uses two metaphors; the safe place (refuge, fortress, under the cover of God's wings) and the safe journey (guarding you in all your ways, bearing you up, not treading on a snake).

It concludes with the most startling set of promises uttered by Godself to the one who dwells in God and walks in God's way: *I will deliver, I will protect, I will answer, I will be with, I will rescue, I will satisfy.*

Connections with the Gospel reading: The psalm comes with a health warning, as the gospel story sets out. Such promises of God's protection and care can easily be misused and misunderstood.

Note that, for all that Jesus knew and loved and prayed the psalms, here it is the Devil who quotes Ps 91v11-12 to Jesus. Jesus clearly judges that to claim the promise outside of God's will (because this leap for the temple pinnacle is the Devil's idea) is a misuse.

Suggestions and Resources:

Read verses 1-13 of the psalm from Pew Bibles (or projected) taking alternative verses. Pause after verse 13.

Table Talk: Whose experience might this be?  
For whom are these words written?

After some minutes of conversation in small groups, gather people's thoughts.

Then read verses 14-16 yourself (or just one voice):

*14 "Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him;  
I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.*

*15 He will call on me, and I will answer him;  
I will be with him in trouble,*

*I will deliver him and honour him.*

*16 With long life I will satisfy him  
and show him my salvation."*



Prayers for Others and for the World:

Loving God, our refuge in times of trouble, our fortress against all that we fear;  
We, who seek to live in the shadow of your presence,  
pray now for all those who need your shelter:

We pray for those who fear the terrors of the night; drones or dreams.  
for those who fear the arrow that stalks by day; bullets or bombs.  
for those who fear disease and infection; covid or cholera.  
for those who fear the destruction that comes in broad daylight; artillery or arrest.

We pray for those who feel beleaguered and invaded;  
for those whose lives hang in the balance;  
for those for whom the worst has happened.

*Silence.*

Lord Jesus Christ, you know what fear and temptation feel like; and you know what wilderness and warfare look like, we thank you and praise you as the Son of God. By your love and your life laid down, you enable us to know the love of God and to know ourselves as children of God; accept these our prayers and come to save all those for whom we pray. Amen.

Hymn: 486 Who would true valour see

## Mar 16<sup>th</sup> Second in Lent Psalm 27

Gospel reading: Luke 13v31-35

### Background to the Psalm

This psalm (attributed to David) begins and ends in confident, trusting faith, but in between it is clear that the psalmist is beset by enemies all around (v6). But what really marks it out is a deep longing for God... for God's way (v11) but more profoundly for God's presence (v4, 8).

I have frequently turned to it when praying with people in hospital or near to death, for although it is a prayer for God to sustain the psalmist in this life (v4, 13), yet it literally shines with the light of Christ.

### Connections with the Gospel reading

We find Jesus, in Luke's telling, midway on his journey to Jerusalem (which began at 9v51 and ends in Chapter 19). Death threats are in the air (13v31) and it is again clear that Jesus is well aware of the suffering, rejection and death which await him there.

Yet Jesus continues to walk with quiet courage (he is not afraid of Herod) and with his eyes fixed resolutely on Jerusalem. How did he do that?

Well, praying the words of Psalm 27 might well have played their part.

Suggestions and Resources: The psalm is the inspiration for at least two Taizé chants:

*'The Lord is my light, my light and salvation;  
In God I trust, in God I trust.'*

([www.youtube.com/watch?v=r64gcGMNhDE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r64gcGMNhDE))

*'I am sure I shall see the goodness of the Lord,  
In the land of the living; Yes, I shall see,  
The goodness of the Lord. Hold firm, trust in the Lord.'*

([www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnBIOgVJMPE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnBIOgVJMPE))

And a third has strong resonance:

*"Wait for the Lord, whose day is near;  
Wait for the Lord, keep watch, take heart."*

([www.youtube.com/watch?v=PgZN6T61hK0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PgZN6T61hK0))

Learn one of these before the service, and then read the psalm using the chant repeatedly:

To begin, after v3, after v6, after v10, and to end.

This will work best if singing unaccompanied with just once through each time. Alternatively, use a recorded or projected version before and after the whole psalm, and sing the chant through at least six times.

Prayers of Joy and Concern: *Small candles are laid on a tray or perhaps around a large world map. A large candle burns nearby, and ideally the small candles are lit from the large one which has been burning since the beginning of the service. Cook's Matches are best. Give some thought to fire safety.*

Holy God, we thank you that your love for us is like that of a mother hen for her brood; we thank you for the warmth of your love, the protection of your wings and the generosity of your provision. You are all that we can ask or desire.

We ask the help of your Spirit as we seek to live in your presence, to seek your face and to walk in your way. Amen.

So, hear now our prayers of joy and concern...

*People are invited to come forward and light a night light, and perhaps to say for whom or for where or for what they are lighting it.*

Lord's Prayer:

Gospel reading: Luke 13v1-9

Background to the Psalm: This psalm is not only attributed to David, but is given the narrative setting of when David was in the wilderness. The context of wilderness (which is a rich metaphor) gives the image of thirsting great power. Like Psalm 27 last week, there is a confident trust here not just in God's protection (v7), but more deeply in God's presence (v3, 5). The wilderness is a place where we learn our need of God (v8).

Connections with the Gospel reading: This is a difficult gospel reading to preach. Its main focus is on the need and limited time for repentance and its *fruits* (v9 cf. 3v8). In Psalm 1, we are reminded of the tree planted by a stream, which bears fruit in its season. We can imagine this tree growing in the wilderness and still bearing fruit.

Suggestions and Resources: The first eight verses make a very good set of opening responses:

O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you, my soul thirsts for you;  
**My flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.**

So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.  
**Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.**

So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name.  
**My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast and my mouth praises you with joyful lips**

When I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night;  
**For you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.**  
**My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.**

There is a beautiful setting of this psalm to be found at No.43 in CH4 (the Church of Scotland Hymnary):

*1 O God, you are my God alone,  
whom eagerly I seek,  
though longing fills my soul with thirst  
and leaves my body weak.  
Just like a dry and barren land  
awaits a freshening shower,  
I long within your house to see  
your glory and your power.*

*2 Your faithful love surpasses life,  
evoking all my praise.  
Through every day, to bless your name,  
my hands in joy I'll raise.  
My deepest needs you satisfy  
as with a sumptuous feast.  
So, on my lips and in my heart,  
your praise has never ceased.*

*3 Throughout the night I lie in bed  
and call you, Lord, to mind;  
in darkest hours I meditate  
how God, my strength, is kind.  
Beneath the shadow of your wing,  
I live and feel secure;  
and daily, as I follow close,  
your right hand keeps me sure.*

*John Bell (born 1949) © 1993 WGRG, c/o Iona Community, Glasgow, [www.wildgoose.scot](http://www.wildgoose.scot)*

It is best sung to the tune in CH4, 'Resignation', but could also be sung to 'Creator God' StF 183 which makes the hymn into six shorter verses. Another beautiful song which explores some of the same ground is: 544 (StF) As the deer pants for the water

## Mar 30<sup>th</sup> Fourth in Lent Psalm 32

Gospel reading: Luke 15v1-3, 11b-32

Background to the Psalm: This psalm is written by someone who knows the liberation and the 'happiness' of knowing oneself forgiven, and as such it is not difficult to connect with David.

The story of his adultery, deceit and murder is told in 2 Samuel 11 and is more strongly associated with Psalm 51. Psalm 32 is one of seven 'penitential psalms' (Ps 6,32,38,51,102,130,143). The double use of the term 'Happy' or 'Blessed' should remind of Psalm 1 and 2, for this prayer is offered by the Psalm 1 man and the Psalm 2 king.

What is clear now is that such righteousness is not on the basis of our behaviour (or 'works', see Romans 4v6-8 where this psalm is quoted), but on the basis of God's covenant love.

### Connections with the Gospel reading

This wonderful story is a picture of the covenant love of God in tension with the sin and hard-heartedness of humanity. The younger son amply illustrates sin (rebellion, hurtfulness, separation, heedless and profligate behaviour) while the older son illustrates hard-heartedness (envy, pride, lack of compassion and a refusal to forgive). It is not difficult to imagine this psalm on the lips of the younger son, but what would it take for the older brother to make it his?

### Suggestions and Resources:

Table Talk: Can you think of an occasion when you have been forgiven for something?  
How did it feel?

Prayer of Confession: Using selected verses of the psalm.

- A: We praise you, Eternal God, for your grace towards us:  
As a loving Father, you have provided all we need... food to eat through the fruitfulness of the earth and the work of human hands; water to drink that is clean and free from disease; air to breath that does not choke us; a place to call home and people whom we love and who love us. *Pause.*  
You loved us enough to give us freedom, even when you knew that we would misuse it. Whatever we may have done, or failed to do, what grieves you most is that awkward silence, those unspoken words, the damage to our relationship with you. *Pause.*
- B: *"When I kept silent my bones wasted away, through my groaning all day long.  
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;  
my strength was sapped as in the heat of Summer.  
Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity."* (Ps 32v3-5b)
- A: Loving God, we freely confess to our brokenness; to the ways we wound our lives, the lives of others, and the life of the world. *Pause*
- B: *"I said, 'I will confess my transgressions before the Lord' -  
and you forgave the guilt of my sin."* (Ps 32v5c)
- A: In the name of Jesus know your sin is forgiven.  
In the power of the Spirit live out of the grace that in yours in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- B: *"Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found;  
surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach you. You are my hiding place;  
You will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance."* (Ps 32v6-7)
- A: Thanks be to God. Amen.

The following songs which express the 'blessedness' of forgiveness may be helpful:

553 I am a new creation

424 God forgave my sin in Jesus' name

427 I'm accepted, I'm forgiven

And a hymn which very much calls the gospel story to mind:

443 Come let us sing of a wonderful love

The grace that lies at the root of both the psalm and gospel story was dear to the heart of the Wesley brothers: 436 What shall I do, my God to love?

**Apr 6<sup>th</sup>**

**Passion Sunday Fifth in Lent**

**Psalm 126**

Gospel reading: John 12v1-8

Background to the Psalm: This is one of the 'Songs of Ascent', which we imagine were used by pilgrims going up to Jerusalem at festival time. It recalls the time – most obviously after their exile in Babylon between 590-540BC – when Jews were allowed to return to 'Zion', as Jerusalem is frequently referred to in these psalms (eg Ps 125v1, 128v5).

The puzzle is why then, in verse 4, is there a heartfelt plea for God to 'do it again'? Whether in the life of Israel or in the life of the Church, great days and times always pass, and we yearn for the final fulfilment of God's kingdom. Until then we are all 'exiles and aliens' passing through this world (1 Peter 1v1 and 2v11).

#### Connections with the Gospel reading

In the context of John's Gospel (if not of our journey through Lent) Jesus is already in Jerusalem. His 'triumphal' entry is described in 12v12-15. But there are several clues as to what awaits him: whilst in Bethany, Mary inadvertently anointed his feet for the day of his burial (12v7), next Jesus is linked with Lazarus (who died and was raised), and now Jesus uses a parable of the seed that falls to the earth and dies in order to produce much fruit.

This sense of sorrow leading to joy and the cost of freely giving his life, finds resonance in the final verses of the psalm. The restoration of fortunes for which the psalm prays is ultimately a prayer for God's kingdom to come in all its fullness.

#### Suggestions and Resources:

Read Psalm 126v1-3

Table Talk: Can you think of a time when you felt full of joy and wonder because your 'fortunes' had been 'restored'?

Read Psalm 126v4-6

Table Talk: Can you think of a time when you felt you were 'sowing with tears'?



Prayers of Concern: With repeated response...

Saving God, we pray that those who sow in tears:

**May reap with songs of joy.**

We pray for those who have lost lives and loved ones, especially when this has happened violently. We pray for all those who have lost homes and family in war – in Ukraine, Israel-Palestine, Sudan - and for those who are hanging onto life by their finger tips, amidst chaos and carnage.

Saving God, we pray that those who sow in tears:

**May reap with songs of joy.**

We pray for those living in refugee camps across the world, fleeing war zones or famine; we pray for the role of the United Nations and relief agencies, and for a more generous response on the part of our own country;

Saving God, we pray that those who sow in tears:

**May reap with songs of joy.**

We pray for those who feel they have nothing left to give, nowhere else to turn... swallowed up by depression, trapped in addiction, overwhelmed by grief, slaves to debt, living in fear or pain...

Saving God, we pray that those who sow in tears:

**May reap with songs of joy.**

We pray for Churches who have experienced the pain and sadness of closure, and where costly efforts are being made to establish New Places for New People.

Saving God, we pray that those who sow in tears:

**May reap with songs of joy.**

Lord's Prayer

Prayer of Dedication

Loving God, thank you for those times when life has worked out in ways we could never have imagined; when you have filled our mouths with laughter. Help us to remember those times, so that when life is hard, our labour seems futile and the ground barren, we may find the strength and courage to continue to sow seeds of hope, even through our tears.

In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**