

1. Times of trouble

I came across these photos on facebook. The heading for the photos is Animals stuck in odd places but don't seem to mind. Great pictures which capture a moment where these animals who ~~are~~ look like they are calm. You can almost hear them saying I'm all good, I meant to do that. But we can clearly see that they're really not good.

I think if we're honest with ourselves this is sometimes the behaviour that's expected in our society when we face a time of trouble. We can convince ourselves we are all good, when we are not.

An important side note before we continue, There may be some of you here going through pain and suffering right now. This is horrible and I'm really sorry that you're going through it. I will be praying that our psalm today will encourage you and that it won't be too painful. But it could be and if so please speak with someone you trust afterwards and

receive comfort from them. Whether that be a listening ear or sitting silently with you in your pain.

I don't think I need to convince you all that pain and suffering is part of the reality of life in this world. We're all impacted by it one way or the other. Whether it be physical or mental health illness, relationship difficulties, loneliness, infertility, work and financial difficulties, death, or whether it's persecution for being a follower of Jesus and standing firm in what you believe, All These situations can leave us troubled, in despair, and in grief. It's the reality of life, it's the reality that our world is broken, and that this life isn't the way it is supposed to be.

How do we often respond to our pain and suffering?

We sometimes don't know what to do, do we, It can be quite paralysing and overwhelming and we often withdraw and hide our pain trying to deal with it ourselves, sometimes we push our pain aside and just grin and bear it just like those animals in our photos, pretending it's ok, or perhaps we might compare our suffering with other people whose life is much worse than ours and think, what am I complaining about - I'm not going through much compared to them, I just need to suck it up and get on with it. Or perhaps we might jump straight to cheering ourselves up

with our theology and say that it's all ok because God's in control he loves us and one day there will be no pain.

Why do we respond in this way? Why do we largely deny our pain? I think it's because Pain and suffering tend to make us uncomfortable, It's a culture that we've created so that if we express pain and suffering it is a sign of weakness, or we always feel like we're having to justify why we're crying and in pain, I've noticed that when people cry they say sorry for crying. Why do we do that? If this is how we respond to pain and suffering, then it's no wonder that people who are going through pain and suffering sometimes withdraw from community, even from church community. Sometimes we don't give permission to allow people to feel their pain, and to be real with it. As followers of Jesus how are we to respond to pain and suffering?

When we look to God's word, we see many examples of people going through times of trouble, and they show us what their response is.

Today in psalm 5, we see David the king of Israel going through a time of trouble. In Psalm 3 we learn that David is running away from his son Absalom who is wanting to kill him and become king himself. David knows what it means to be in pain and suffering. Here in s psalm 5, We

don't get given much information about the circumstances, but we do know that he is in a time of trouble.

Let's have a look at psalm 5 and see how David responds to his pain and suffering

Crying out to God (vs 1-3)

The first thing that we can learn from King David is that we are not crying out to nothing, we are to cry out to the LORD, to YAHWEH to David's King.

What are you reminded of when you hear these names?

For David and the Jewish people, Hearing David cry out using these names of God would remind them of how great and trustworthy God is. Elohim, the one who created the heavens and the earth and everything in it, when david says my King - He is saying that God is the King of all kings - a king who protects and shields, and the name Yahweh reminds him of His faithful God the one who makes promises and keeps them. This is the kind of God who David is turning to for help.

The second thing that we learn in the very first verse is that we can and should cry out honestly to God about our pain and troubles. Let's not be like the animals in the introduction and pretend that nothing is wrong and we don't need help.

In verses 1-2 David is pleading with God to listen, the king of Israel is honestly and urgently crying out to God for help.

You know, Sometimes when we are in the depths of despair and troubled, there are no words that can express how we feel or what we can ask for. That's why I really like the second line of this psalm, consider my lament. The verse can also be translated as consider my groaning. David reminds us here that it's ok to not always have the words. in Romans 8:26 we are promised that the Holy Spirit will intercede for you through wordless groans. God knows even when we have no words to express.

I want to pause for a second at this point because as I mentioned at the beginning we often don't deal with grief and pain very well. And please don't hear me saying we don't do it at all because that's not true, but I am saying that overall we could be better at dealing with it. Even in our churches we sometimes get it wrong, we try to cheer people up out

of their distress too quickly, we use clichés and bandaid verses that are meant to make people feel better, we bypass the pain and try to rush people to be happy. Church seems to always be a happy place where we sing God's praises, talk of God's love, hope and goodness but there's not much real talk of the reality of pain and suffering. We don't often cry out to God in our community prayers here in church or in our songs do we? Perhaps we need to make more space for that. Would we be uncomfortable if we did? For some of us it might be. There was a song that I used to sing at school, even though the music is a bit dated but I really like the words.

One of the verses says I will weep when you are weeping when you laugh I'll laugh with you I will share your joy and sorrow till we've seen this journey through. Whenever I sing these words I think to myself, what a great picture of what our church community should be like, this is the kind of loving community I want to be in, as brothers and sisters in Christ there should be a place for us to relate like this with each other. I think we do the second line relatively well BUT that first line - I will weep when you are weeping - we may not do this as well as we should? It's hard because it means we open ourselves up to each other

and this doesn't mean you cry with every single person in the church, but is there a group or one or two people that you can do this with? That's one of the great positives of meeting together in small groups, and if you're not in one, I encourage you to join one, if you're not sure how to please speak with Marty or myself.

I have a friend who is going through terrible pain and suffering, and it's hard and horrible for her and the family. I want to be able to spend time with her in her grief, I want to be able to sit and cry with her, to acknowledge that life is horrible for her at this time, I want to be able to pray in groans with her to our God. Does our culture allow us to be comfortable doing that?

This is the question and challenge for us. When we're in pain, Do we allow ourselves to be in pain and cry it out to God or do we deny and brush it off to the side? If you might not be someone willing to share your pain and grief, that's ok I'm not wanting to force you to, but let us all try to create a culture where people have the permission to express their grief and pain without feeling shamed, or be sorry for crying.

To cry out to God is an important part of the process of our pain and suffering, we shouldn't be too quick to jump over this aspect. But also

equally important is that David doesn't stop at this point in his prayer.

As David turns to God, he knows that God is listening to him, he has hope and confidence in God, and so he lays down his requests and groans and waits expectantly.

Illustration - I think kids can be a good example of how to wait expectantly. This is my nephew Mitchell, and I absolutely adore him. I've been told by his parents that on the days when I come to hang out with him, he is waiting expectantly for me. My brother installed a camera at their front door, so you can see who's coming up to the door even before you ring the doorbell. His parents told me that on the mornings I come to hang out, he's playing with his trains, but his radar is up, and he's constantly checking the camera, constantly listening for sounds at the front door. He's waiting expectantly for me to turn up. This is the kind of waiting that David is doing. He's pouring out his heart to God, and he's waiting for God's answer to his troubles, and he's confident that the answer is going to come.

We can learn from this attitude and ask ourselves Are we waiting expectantly for God to answer our prayers? Are we waiting to see what

God will do. Sometimes we don't pray for things because we don't think that God's going to answer because he takes too long to answer our prayers or perhaps we pray and go through the routine of prayer, and we're not really expecting answers. The underlying problem I think is that we aren't fully trusting in God and his sovereign power. King David can wait expectantly because the God he turns to, is the King of Kings, is Yahweh the faithful promise maker, and Elohim the creator of the whole universe and all that these titles entails, and David trusts in Him.

So David teaches us in these first 3 verses that we can honestly turn to God with all our troubles, to acknowledge our pain, and that we should be waiting expectantly. Do we cry out to this same God? Can we trust him?

3. Hope in God and his character (vs 4-9)

David again doesn't stop there in his prayer, and he goes on to give further reason as to why he has confidence and hope in God.

The first thing is that God is a good God who hates wickedness.

David begins in verse 4-6 says I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly Because you are a God that is not pleased with wickedness, he says I have hope in you, because you do not welcome evil people, I trust in you God because I know the arrogant cannot stand in his presence, and that you hate all who do wrong, and that you destroys those who tells lies.

Were you expecting David to write these words? At first glance it wasn't what I expected, I would think that he would talk about God's loving kindness, or refer to God's faithfulness, which he does do later on in the psalm. But the first thing he mentions is about God's judgement and anger towards evil and wickedness???. It's quite shocking, and it forces us to ask the question how does God's anger and judgement give David hope? To answer this question we need to see that God's anger and judgement is good. If God simply overlooks wickedness or turns a blind eye to the evil in our world, then God himself will not be good. If he simply tolerated evil, then this world right now is as good as it gets, it would never be put right. But because God hates evil we can have hope that this world will be put right. David knows that evil will not

have the last word in this world, he knows that God will eventually put everything right.

The second question that we need to ask in light of verse 4-6 is then who is able to enter into the presence of God? Have you thought about the kind of people that fit into description of verse 4-6?

Who are these people? It is the evil dictators of the world, it is the wicked people who engage in human trafficking, It is the people who are bloodthirsty - who are murderers or thieves, it is the people who are abusive and take advantage of the vulnerable, it is the people who are arrogant and selfish - who say I'm confident in myself, it includes all people who do wrong, it includes all the people who tell lies. IN all honesty every person born into this world is named on this list. It includes me and it includes you. We've all done wrong.

That's what the bible tells us about humans, isn't it?, that everyone has rebelled against God we have all sinned against him, and this means we are not able to be in his presence. Later on in the psalm, David says of God's enemies in verse 9 Their throat is an open grave; with their tongues they tell lies. Paul uses this verse in Romans to argue for the universal sinfulness of mankind

in Romans 3:10-12 is says

“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. And quoting from psalm 5 Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.”

Do we minimise our sin, do we think ourselves better than we are?

Please don't think that your name is not on the list, it is. It seems quite bleak for everyone at this point, but it leads us to our third question, how is it that David (who was not a perfect person) able to turn to God and enter into his presence? And why would this depressing news comfort us in our grief?

Well verse 7 says that it is not anything that David does, he understands that it is only because of God's great love that he can enter into the house of the Lord, and he enters into God's presence humbly and with reverence. That word Great love, is the covenant relationship word of God, it reminds us of his loving kindness to his people, His undeserved generosity to them. God's great love is the only way that David can

enter into God's presence. Now we have the benefit of reading this psalm 3000 years later, we know that David doesn't enter the presence of God by his own moral goodness, and we know that Jesus Christ is the perfect man who can enter God's presence on his own. and Jesus, as he stands in that place, sacrifices himself as the perfect offering, and in shedding his blood on the cross Jesus opens up the way, he freely gives an all access pass for every person to approach God with fear and confidence.

This is the great promise of the gospel, this is the good news that Jesus brings. When Jesus returns to judge and we stand before God, if we trust in Jesus instead of being declared guilty and being banished from his presence, Jesus stands with us saying they're with me, do not drive them away, but welcome them in. We are able to enter God's presence with confidence because of God's great love, we are forgiven of our wickedness because of what Jesus has done for us.

Having pleaded with the Lord to hear and answer his prayers, and having affirmed his confidence and hope in the character of his God, David is now ready to make his requests.

4.What to pray?

IN this psalm, David prays for 3 major things.

1. He prays for himself - For David, like us, experiencing the presence of God as a forgiven person draws us to live God's way. The psalmist didn't want to enter the presence of God just to visit and then go home, what he desired was an ongoing experience of God, he desired that God will continue to help him to live God's way. This is why he finally presents his petition in verse 8 saying Lead me, LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies - make your way straight before me. This is more than a psalm of lament, it's also a psalm of longing to live God's way. King David is asking God to help him to make his path straight, because he knows that when his enemies are surrounding him it's going to be hard to live God's way. We've recently finished a sermon series on growing more like Christ - as the troubles of life surround us are we praying to God to help lead us, to help us to be more like Christ? AS we come into God's presence, whether it's here at church, or in bible study, or in our own personal time reading God's word, are we continually humbling ourselves before God

and asking God to lead us, are we allowing God to be King in all areas of our lives?

2. The second thing that we see David pray for is about his enemies in verse 10. do you feel a little uneasy at this point? David is praying for those who are wicked to be declared guilty, that they might be banished, that they might receive what they deserve. That's sounds quite harsh doesn't it? Aren't we supposed to be loving, and want those who are wicked to not perish so that they can find God's love and forgiveness be welcomed into God's presence. Yes we do want this and God wants people to turn back to him. But this prayer of David's is calling for justice upon people who will not turn to God, and who want to continue to live in wickedness. They will face judgement and destruction. Now because God is good, he also has great love for his people, and through his Son Jesus Christ, he freely gives anyone access to enter into his presence. If you are someone who has yet to enter into God's presence, I encourage you to humble yourself before him, appropriately fear the King of Kings, and receive the gift of grace given to you through Jesus Christ. If you're not sure how,

come and speak to Marty or myself, or someone here at church that you know is a follower of Jesus, we would be delighted to walk with you as you enter into God's presence.

So David here is praying for God to do as he promised, to judge justly the wicked.

3. The third and last thing that David prays for is for other believers in Verse 11 and 12, do you see how David finishes off this psalm by drawing others in. At the beginning of the psalm David is crying out to God listen to MY words, to MY groaning. But as David concludes his psalm, he prays for all who find refuge in God. This includes everyone who trusts in God, it includes you and it includes me.

It doesn't matter in the slightest if you've never been in the same position as King David, I mean who here has been King of Israel on the run from their son trying to usurp the throne? Not I. But as David prays here, the psalm broadens. His prayer is for those who take refuge in God to be glad and rejoice. David prays for protection over all of God's people, from his time all the way to 2017 and even beyond.

For those of us who trust in God, the great promise that we have laid out before us is access to the Father. When we feel out of control, it is appropriate for us to go to the one who is in control of all things. IN this psalm David doesn't go to God like he's a magic genie to grant us 3 requests that will immediately take away all our troubles, No, He turns to God and desires to be in an ongoing relationship with the Lord of the universe to whom we can pour out our hearts, our fears and laments. He turns to God and asks him for help, for God to walk with him through troubled times. David has confidence and Hope in his God and is able to wait expectantly for God to answer, he is able to rejoice because he can take refuge in God, and know that God will protect and bless those he loves.

So as we reflect on psalm 5 this morning, I hope first of all that you've been encouraged to trust in God and to enter into his presence. I hope you've been encouraged to acknowledge your pain and suffering, to cry out to God in your pain. I pray that you are encouraged to Hope in God when you're in troubled times. Are you encouraged to pray for each other, that we might rejoice in God, and pray that he will continue to protect and shield us from evil. Are you encouraged to ask God to lead

you in his way, to ask him to help you to grow more like Christ each day.

This is my prayer for all of us, will it be yours too?

Let me pray

Heavenly Father, We thank you for who you are. That you are Yahweh, that you are the creator of heavens and earth, and that you are the King of all Kings. We thank you that we can enter into your presence through the precious blood of Jesus. We thank you that you hear our groaning from the pain and suffering we may experience in this world. Lord it's not easy going through troubled times, and sometimes all we can do is just cry out in pain. Lord ease the hearts of all those who are troubled here this morning. Please help them to honestly cry out to you in pain. But also Lord, please help all of us to have confidence and hope in you, knowing that you do love us, that you do care for us, and that you are in control over all things, and that there will be a time when there is no more pain and suffering. Lord help us each day by your Holy spirit, that you may help us to walk with you, please lead us in your righteousness, help us each day to grow more and more like Christ. We ask all these things, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen