

## **SERMON – 7/7/24**

### 'Time and Creation'

“Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the Lord.” (Psalm 102:18)

History was never a strong suit of mine when I was at school. Perhaps it was because I had a singularly uninspiring teacher or perhaps the fault lay in my own failure to grasp that the study of history was less about learning lists of dry facts and much more about discerning trends and learning lessons from the past for the present and for the future. Maybe it is because I am entering my 'anecdotalage' that I find myself more inclined to look back over my own lifetime and recognise patterns as I see elements of history repeating themselves.

At least when it comes to British history, 2024 will go down in the annals as a significant year not just because there was a General Election but because that election heralded a change of direction in government, as when in 1979 Margaret Thatcher took office or in 1997 when Tony Blair came to power. Whatever you think of either of those figures you would probably agree that this year's change of government under Keir Starmer is more akin to the arrival on the scene of David Cameron in 2010 than to the fervour of Thatcherism or New Labour.

Over these summer Sundays we are looking at what the Psalms have to say to us about aspects of Creation, and today I would like to reflect a bit with you on the subject of Time. Although it's perhaps not something you would immediately think about when considering creation, there is quite a rich seam to mine here, I think.

Time is something that is never very far from our thoughts. It's of the very essence of the created order. Most of us will consult a watch or clock or mobile phone regularly to check on the hours and the minutes and we have calendars and diaries to manage our days and weeks and months. The upcoming Olympic Games will have us watching the seconds and in some cases the split seconds and we are good at marking the years, whether to keep track of the ebb and flow of history as I have said already or to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries.

Last Sunday we looked at the theme of worship in creation, the sea resounding, the rivers clapping their hands and the mountains singing together for joy before the Lord, but we are in a very different context in this week's Psalm.

Psalm 102 is often listed amongst the psalms of lament or complaint, because it arises out of an individual's cry for help in the opening verses that we didn't read earlier. But it is also sometimes included amongst what are known as the Messianic Psalms, those that point forward to the coming of Christ, and both of these things have to be kept in mind as we reflect on the verses we did read.

One of the key things about time is that it passes away, like sand slipping through an hour glass or a second hand sweeping round a watch face or the rhythmic ticking of a pendulum on a clock. How fast the seconds go as athletes tear along a track or swimmers propel themselves through the water and the electronic digits flash round almost invisibly. If you have ever been here in the church on your own you will possibly have heard the gentle ticking of the clock up in the gallery there. It is original to the church building and it's amazing to think that has ticked away the seconds for just short of 200 years since this church was built. By contrast the clock in the tower behind me has been there less than 100 years and although the bell has been there a lot longer it has only chimed the hours in more recent times. The marking of time is all around us.

Perhaps we think of stone as having a longer life-span than clocks but all that remains of the previous church in Kinross is the tower by the old Town Hall in the High Street and the church building before that is remembered only in the name of the Kirkgate, the way people went to get to it. The psalmist, speaking of ancient Jerusalem, writes: "Her stones are dear to your servants, her very dust moves them to pity." (v.14) Just like the flowers of the field and just like the animals and birds and fish, nations and empires and civilisations also rise and fall. Even the ancient Brodgar Stones that we saw on the video earlier are *only* about 5000 years old which is the blink of an eye in terms of the age of the earth and of the universe in which it is probably a relatively recent arrival. Generations, centuries, millennia, eras and ages and aeons come and go, they are created and they pass away, but as the psalmist says, "You,

Lord, sit enthroned for ever, your renown endures through all generations." (v.12)

And therein lies the heart of the message of this Psalm. Everything in this world is transitory but God the Creator is from everlasting to everlasting and far from leading us to despair at the fragility (and even the futility) of life, that gives us hope because it elevates the significance of our lives to an infinite degree.

Yes, God is higher and greater than our imagining, yet this mighty, eternal Lord hears and responds to the cries and the prayers of the destitute and as the psalmist acknowledges here "He will not despise their plea." (v.17)

And so the psalmist exhorts us in the words with which I began: "Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the Lord." (v.18) There are two earth-shattering pieces of information for us to grasp as we try to make sense of God's dealings with us in time and eternity and as I draw attention to them here this morning I also want to impress upon you how vital it is that, when this good news – for it is the Gospel – takes hold of us, we each take every step we possibly can in every moment to pass it on to others, as Paul says to the Corinthians "Now is the time of God's favour, today is the day to be saved." (2 Cor. 6:2)

The first crucial point is that though the Creator is eternal – magnificently so, from everlasting to everlasting, at work before the beginning of time and enthroned in splendour still when all things have reached their conclusion – God is nonetheless entirely and gloriously present in every single moment, now and now and now. With every tick of the second hand or swing of the pendulum, God is here. Morning, noon and night, God is here. Sunrise, sunset, week by week, month to month, year on year, in every generation God is here. Through the millions of years that shape galaxies and solar systems, God is sovereign, beyond our imagining, and yet in this moment, now, here, the Most High is with us through the Holy Spirit, as Jesus knocks on the door of each heart and life with abundant love and constant compassion. And it is because of that that each one of us, with the psalmist and with countless generations of God's people can cry to Him in our moments of trouble and wondering and discover that the

Lord is near, so near, so present, so utterly attentive to that very moment of need. God is not far from us – right now, Jesus draws near.

It works both ways as Peter wrote in our second reading this morning, "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day." (2 Peter 3:8) Just as a millennium may seem as a drop in the ocean to the One who is eternal, in just the same way a single day may be invested with what we might consider the significance of a thousand years. Not only is God present with us in each moment, that moment is invested with eternal significance. "My days vanish like smoke," (v.3) the psalmist cries in his anguish, "but you, Lord, sit enthroned for ever." (v.12)

My friends if you are ever tempted to think that you don't matter, know this with certainty: the everlasting God holds you in His care. Let that be written for a future generation that a people not yet created may know it too. Tell that good news wherever you go this week and to whomever you encounter.

And the second point is that though we (and everyone and everything else) will ultimately pass away – as the psalmist writes here, our days will be cut short (v.23), even the heavens and the earth will wear out like a garment to be changed and discarded (v.26) – nonetheless the children of God, the servants of God will live in the presence of God (v.28). Although perhaps as he wrote the psalmist considered that to mean that, as we have been saying, he would know the presence of God in every moment of life, good or bad, high or low, the messianic fulfilment of these words in Jesus Christ assures us that the everlasting way has been opened for all who will walk that way with Jesus to be embraced by the Ancient of Days by whom we are adopted as dearly loved children. In Christ, the eternal One has entered into time, not only to be born as one of us and to share with us the constraints of time and of our mortality but also to set the prisoners free, to release those condemned to death (v.20) and to share with us eternity and immortality.

This is the Gospel. Let it be written for a future generation that a people not yet born may know it too and sing God's praises eternally. Go and tell that to a world that is crying out for so much more than can ever be satisfied by the things of this

world. It's not just prime ministers and governments that come and go; time is passing and the clock has ticked probably a thousand times while I've been speaking, but into these moments the hope of eternity is breaking. The eternal God is here and in this very moment there is grace, there is the opportunity for salvation. Don't let another moment pass without embracing it, or rather allowing yourself to be embraced by the everlasting arms. Now is the time. Today is the day. God has set eternity in the human heart and God has provided the way by which we may enter into it.

"Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the Lord."