

Reflection. Third Sunday after Pentecost 21st June 2020.
Lectionary Readings.
Genesis 21:8-12; Psalm 86; Romans 6:1-11; St Matthew 10:24-39

The Book of Psalms is close to the hearts of many Scots, possibly as a result of the Metrical Psalms for Scotland being sanctioned by the General Assembly and which first appeared in 1650. I am old enough to remember attending church in Glasgow as a youngster, and each service beginning with one of the Metrical Psalms – and (to me at least) using the strange split page of words and music meaning whatever tune was being sung, you always had the words and music together. I also remember when CH3 was first published and the genuine regret that so many Psalms had been omitted, only slightly improved with the publication of CH4.

We all know the Psalms – 23, 121, 139, 100 among the best known. Others are not so well known although individual verses might be. Psalm 86, part of our lectionary readings for today, is perhaps one of the least known and in fact does not appear in CH4.

It's believed that Psalm 86 was not written for any particular occasion, but was a prayer that David himself often used. If you take time to read the psalm, it's fairly obvious that the language is very plain and lacks any of the poetic gems such as are found in the 23rd Psalm and Psalm 121.

It is also clear that this is a deeply personal prayer - "Hear, O Lord, and answer me" He obviously has a deep relationship with God, and is in no doubt that he is able to petition God at all times and in all circumstances. He speaks about his distress, he pleads for God's good will towards all who would seek Him, and he acknowledges that "God is great and does marvellous deeds" and that "great is God's love" for him.

Psalm 86 is a very in-depth lesson on prayer. Commentators note that Psalm 86 is in Book three of the Psalter and is the only one labelled as written by David. It's impossible to put a specific time in David's life for this prayer because there are too many possible points where this connects with his overall circumstances.

But to me the lack of being able to pinpoint them to a particular time in David's life is less important than what the Psalm actually says. There are fifteen requests made to God in these 17 verses.

Here you find a man who puts his faith in God while crying out desperately. The psalm is filled with these 15 requests although some of them are repetitive. There are four sections for these requests.

In 86:1-7, David cries out in great need for God to hear and act on his behalf.

In 86:8-10 there is a deliberate request of praise when David declares God as the only true God - the lord of the nations.

Then in 86:11-13, David asks for God to teach him and unite his heart to fear God so that he can glorify Him forever.

And then finally in 86:14-17, David appeals to God's mercy and grace to deliver him.

So what does this Psalm teach us? I think the main lesson and if we look at the bigger picture, what encompasses the entire psalm is that in times of our greatest need we should be driven to God in prayer as He alone is the one who can help us.

God is the only one who has control over the world that we live in. No matter how hard we wish, the Lord is the only one who can really provide us with the strength and hope to get where we yearn to be. Once we all learn to put God first, then everything else will fall into place. In other words God is the key to everything.

But in Psalm 86:14 David mentions others, people who are around him at various times in his life. He specifically mentions the arrogant, violent men who are threatening his life. David is fully aware of his need and this drives him to “take it to the Lord in prayer”.

But there is also another aspect of this Psalm. It helps us to recognize and understand our own selfishness and helps to shed light on the bigger picture of relationships within families and the church.

And throughout the entirety of Psalm 86, David gives glory to God. He praises Him throughout the prayer in the most humble and reverent adoration. Throughout everything he never takes away from God’s greatness nor his infinite goodness.

With all that is going on in the world, with all the trials and tribulations being faced by so many people, this lesser known Psalm reminds us of our need to turn to God, to take everything to God in prayer. If we do, then we also, like David, can declare with hope – “You, O Lord, have helped me and comforted me”.