

Psalm 31, Acts 7:55-60, John 14:1-14 - (18th May 2014 – Lou)

Listen to sound clip of Pharrell Williams 'Happy'

Now here's a song that I'm sure many of us would love to be able to know was going to be the soundtrack for the rest of our lives.

Happy! 'Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof. Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth. Clap along if you know what happiness is to you. Nothing can bring me down my level's too high.'

If you could choose a sound track for the rest of your life...wouldn't you like to choose this one let's be honest it sounds a lot more favorable than the lyrics of the song we've heard read to us this morning do. Psalm 31 was actually a song, its written we are told in the introduction for the director of music...I doubt the tune's as catchy as Pharrell Williams after hearing the lyrics. And let's not forget that these lyrics were written by the King of Israel, King David, a man of power and authority, one of the best known biblical characters of all time, a man who carved out an Empire that was unmatched in ancient Israel's history, and of whom it was said he had a heart after God's own heart. It would seem that just like me and you he also experienced a good few downers in life as well.

We could of course try to work out what might have been happening in David's life to have made him so obviously down, disturbed and desperate as he sounds here and there are many different suggestions for what may have been the cause for this song that articulates quite clearly a cry for help, but you see I wonder whether it really matters that we know exactly what the cause, the reason for the song is. It may in the end just mean we keep it at arms length and don't ask how it might be helpful for us, for you and me when maybe like David we sense our lives are not readily fitting into the Pharrell Williams soundtrack.

Its so easy to believe there's a God and to see our lives being in God's hands when things are great, life is wonderful and all is happy but it's not quite so easy when we encounter difficulties, when life become precarious, when wrong stuff just seems to keep happening. This Psalm seems to describe some very real and difficult situations David obviously feels his life is in danger, times are very testing, he is experiencing anguish, his body is giving way under the stress of everything, his friends have all cleared off and left him, he is the object of slander and gossip, his future seems unknown and he has a sense of rejection and isolation.

These are all very real emotions expressed here that I'm sure at times we have all known to some degree or another, or maybe even this morning you can really identify with them. I mean as a pastor and also as an ex A&E nurse I have to say if I was confronted by someone presenting with this kind of mind set expressing this anguish, isolation, sense of threat and abandonment, the feeling that everyone's talking about them, spreading rumors, the overwhelming sense that this person is fading away under the enormity of the stress and difficulty of life, I would be deeply concerned about their safety and wellbeing. Wouldn't you? Or maybe as I've been talking you already know the concern and worry because its sounds like someone you know and love, or maybe it's even made you wonder whether you should be concerned about how your life is making you feel at the moment.

This Psalm gives us the opportunity to listen in to the cries of someone who is experiencing a very furiously stormy episode in their life and is very clearly wanting God to hear all about it. I wonder how ready at times we can be to just tell God exactly how we feel. David doesn't

really hold back here does he. Come quickly to rescue me, hear me, free me, this is the reality of just how I feel right now please do something. I wonder how ready we are when we feel like this to tell God, to desperately cry out for help. Far too often we can have this idea that we should cry to God, pray to God in a certain way using certain words

Story of Heronsgate kids this week in CTK how long should you pray?

We think that we probably have to tell God the things about ourselves that will keep him happy with us, the things we think he'd want to hear. David's cry, his desperate cry for help here would seem to suggest something very different to that.

And although we never hear any evidence that David cries out to God and then God makes everything ok and switches the music back to Pharrell for him we can I think hear and see that in the middle of this storm David experiences and knows some kind of peace and hope and comfort, we hear him gaining some sense that God has heard him and that he is aware of God's love for him, he is able to commit himself fully into God's hands. The last few words of his song are I think a call for us to do the same how else can we be strong and take heart even when the sound track isn't Pharrell if it isn't to throw all we are into God' hands?

Last year sometime I watched a documentary programme all about a storm chaser. This bloke basically spent all of his time tracking down where great storms were going to be in the world and then travelling to chase them. The whole point of this exercise was to try and get into the centre of the storm, to experience what is known as the eye of the storm. The eye of a storm you see is a region of mostly calm weather found at the centre of strong tropical cyclones. Surrounding this eye of the storm is usually what is called an eye wall a ring of towering thunderstorms where the most severe weather of a cyclone occurs. Hence the challenge of the whole thing and also the danger, you have to travel through the most severe and fiercest parts of the storm to experience the eye. And when you do what is it like, well according to this storm chaser 'It comes with all the fury of a hurricane at sea: drenching rains, screaming winds, trees uprooted, branches flying through the air, broken power lines crackling on the pavements. It's frightening. Then suddenly there's a let-up, a lull. Shortly all was still. Not a leaf quivered. The sun even broke through briefly. It was the eye of the storm. And then all hell broke loose again: branches and trees crashing down, the screaming winds, the torrential rain, the power lines throwing out sparks on the pavement. But the moment in the eye, that that breathless moment of utter stillness right in the middle is other worldly.'

David seem to have experienced in the middle of what sounds like an incredibly intense life storm an 'otherworldly stillness and peace'. Not one that denies or forgets the storms but one that can be found in spite of them, in the middle of them all. And of course isn't this a little of what we hear Stephen experience as he is literally murdered for his faith? He sees what is awaiting him, and he sings along to the words of this psalm into your hands I commit my Spirit. And in doing so reminds each one of us that although we may long to have Pharrell as our sound track for the whole of our lives there is hope and comfort and provision for us when the sound track becomes David's song because it was also sung by the Son of God as he died on a cross 'into your hands I commit my spirit'.

So this am if the soundtrack of your life is just like Pharrell and all is happy, then be glad and celebrate. If it is a little more like David's song then take heart, and know the comfort of the very fact that the Son of God can sing along with you to this tune too, he knows the words and is able to grant to you peace, a peace that is beyond all understanding because it is not a peace apart from conflict, pain, suffering, violence, and confusion; that's the kind of peace we

can understand all too well. But it's a peace like the peace in the eye of a storm, a peace smack in the middle of it all. A peace that grants comfort and hope. The destruction and violence, the hopelessness and despair of our storms never have the last word. But God our fortress, and refuge, the one who hears our cries, sees our anguish the one who is good and trustworthy, the one who can sing David's song, He has the last word. So be strong and take heart, all you who whose lives are being lived to the soundtrack of David's song Commit yourselves into God's hands, and receive his peace today.