

His Love endures forever**Psalm 136****PPT1**

'God's love endures forever' - take a moment to notice what your response is to this statement from Ps 136 *God's love endures forever*

This is repeated in every verse of Ps 136 - David the psalmist must have meant it with his whole being.

I was in Singapore in my 20s with a friend and went out to an island for a day.

As I was walking out of the water after a swim I was stung by a jellyfish. When I showed the red lines expanding over my leg the nurse with us called first aid immediately. I felt unable to get dressed so waited for my friends to do so. When the first aid truck arrived I climbed in the back as I realised that if I did not move then I would be unable to as I could feel I was beginning to be paralysed. When the driver noticed he started to drive off but I managed to persuade him to wait for my friends.

A ferry was due so I was stretchered on board- the other passengers watching in silence. By this time I was unable to speak and was grateful when the nurse realised I was in shock and cold and covered me. An ambulance met the boat and I spent the next 3 days in hospital and another week recovering before we could continue our travels.

That morning my QT readings had included Ps 136 with all those repetitions of the phrase: *His love endures forever*. As I had read that I remember thinking - Yes I know that! God's love endures forever.

As the paralytic reaction took away my ability to even communicate - this phrase from the Psalm kept reverberating in my head till the truth of it enveloped my whole being. I felt so safe and so sure of God's love for me that I surrendered to the situation in my head and heart along with the helplessness of my body. I felt through my entire being that I was in God's hands whether I lived or died. It was okay.

Has there been a moment in your life when you had a sense of God with you? caring for or comforting you, maybe rejoicing with you - loving you.....

Gods love endures forever.

It's good to remember these to remind ourselves of our experiences of God's love. Those special moments are precious - when we have a knowing of God that is far deeper than a head knowing. They are like a 'promised land' time in our lives.

But how have we responded to the thought of God's enduring love in tough times - which we all experience? This may be a question you currently hold. Why did God allow this? Does God love me or this other person...?

PPT 2 So how do we view the tough times?

Barbara Brown Taylor (an Anglican priest and theologian) in *An Altar in the World* says ...p78
 ‘Popular religion often focusses on spiritual success. Too many of us don’t know the first thing about the spiritual fruits of failure. When we fall ill, lose our jobs, wreck our marriage, or alienate our children. Even those of us who are ministered to by friends can find it hard to shake the shame of getting lost in our lives. And yet if someone asked us to pinpoint the times in our lives that changed us for the better, a lot of those times would be wilderness times.

When the safety net has split, when the resources have gone, when the way ahead is not clear, the sudden exposure can be both frightening and revealing. We spend so much of our time protecting ourselves from this exposure that a weird kind of relief can result when we fail. ... This is as low as you can go. You told yourself you would die if it ever came to this, but here you are alive. You cannot help yourself and yet you live.’

Last year, for me, felt like a tough, dry time when I broke both arms on separate occasions and subsequently, was in pain and unable to perform many day to day activities. I felt flattened on the ground with the breath knocked out of me and wondering what the future held.

So when these things in life occur do we acknowledge it to ourselves? to another? to God?

Naming it and owning it is the beginning of freedom - then simply consenting to God coming to be with us! Consenting to the inflow of God’s grace.

So how do we view God in the tough times?

There was a time that when I read the bible I would always turn to the psalms. After a while I realised why: because these are prayers of other humans expressing their longings, their sadness or anger, their joy and delight. These writers were people who felt safe to express to God all that they were experiencing and felt and to bring their questions and doubts. Their prayers are honest and raw. The God they knew was safe to come to, whatever they were experiencing in life. Their God was safe enough to express even their rage.

PPT 3

Again an excerpt from **Barbara Brown Taylor in her book *The Preaching Life* by [excerpts from pgs 7-9] - her comments hold up a mirror for us to look at how we perceive God.**

‘Some feel betrayed by a God whom they believe to have broken an implicit promise. According to their bible teachers, God made a bargain with each one of them: do what I say and I will take care of you. So they did, and for years it seemed to work. They obeyed their parents, their teachers, and they were taken care of, but one day the system failed. They did everything right and everything went wrong. Their prayers went unanswered, their belief went unrewarded, their God went AWOL, and the lie was exposed. One man I know, mourning the death of his infant daughter, confessed the depth of his loss. “I don’t know what to believe any more,” he said. “I don’t know whom to pray to, or what to pray. I did the best I knew how, and it didn’t do a bit of good. If God is going to let something like this happen, then what’s the use of believing at all?”

... Disillusionment is the loss of illusion – about ourselves, about the world, about God – and while it is almost always painful, it is not a bad thing to lose the lies we have mistaken for the truth.

Disillusioned, we come to understand that God does not conform to our expectations. We glimpse our own relative size in the universe and see that no human being can say who God should be or how God should act. We review our requirements of God and recognise them as our own fictions. Disillusioned, we find out what is not true and are set free to seek what is – if we dare.

'...For those willing to keep heaving themselves toward the light, things can change. What has been lost gradually becomes less important than what is to be found. Our grief and fear of the unknown takes on an element of wonder, as disillusioned we turn away from the God who was supposed to be, in order to seek the God who is. Every let-down becomes a lesson and a lure. Did God fail to come when I called? Then perhaps God is not a minion. So who is God? Did God fail to punish my adversary? Then perhaps God is not a policeman. So who is God? Did God fail to make everything turn out all right? Then perhaps God is not a fixer. So who is God?

My disappointments draw me deeper into the mystery of God's being and doing. Every time God declines to meet my expectations, another of my idols is exposed. Another curtain is drawn back so I can see what I have propped up in God's place – no, that is not God, so who is God? It is the question of a lifetime, and the answers are never big enough or finished. Pushing past curtain after curtain, it becomes clear that the failure is not God's but my own. God is greater than my imagination, wiser than my wisdom, more dazzling than the universe, as present as the air I breathe and utterly beyond my control.'

PPT4. Reflect : Who is my God?

Is my God safe to be open with ?

Are there things I would rather not talk about with God?

If so - why not? Am I afraid of God's reaction?

Am I learning to live under the God's gaze rather than the glare?

Maybe God is larger and more loving than my perception of God...

Did God ever promise ease in life?

So when we find ourselves in difficult times what can we hold on to...

PPT5 Scripture tells us many times - that God's promise is to be **with us**. - with you...

'God's love endures forever.'

So let us learn to be more observant of God's action and presence in our lives

When we are experiencing a wilderness time and God seems absent let's ask for eyes to see the manna or food that may be falling, or where I might find an oasis to be refreshed, or a heart to grow in trust and faith in God's goodness when all seems silent or dry. There are gifts to be found from our wilderness experiences

Two spiritual practices I use are:

- the prayer of **Examen** that we went through recently is one way - taking time to reflect on our day - what we have learned about ourselves and where and how we have noticed God.

- and also practice **breath prayer** .. this is a great phrase to use as a breath prayer

'God's love endures forever.'

Let's try it for a moment - breathing in - God's love.

and on our out breath: endures forever.

Let's do it silently for a moment.

When we lie awake at night worrying this is a prayer we can use.

PPT6. Let's look briefly as the format of this psalm:

Verses 1-3 are encouraging us to give thanks -when we find ourselves in a critical, negative frame of mind let's practice being more thankful! What is one thing you are thankful for now? something personal, something in our community, our nation and our world.

PPT7. Verses 4-9 leads us through God creating our world - do we take time regularly to be in creation - to observe, to enjoy, to be refreshed by, to become absorbed in.

Ps 19: 1-4 this psalmist expresses his delight in creation..... Read PP Ps 19
Maybe God might want to show you something about creation - maybe God is waiting to speak to you through creation... When you are next in nature - be present and see what happens! Maybe God would enjoy seeing your delight in creation!

PPT8. Verses 10-24 - recaps the story of the journey of the people of Israel - from captivity, through the wilderness into the promised land. This is a metaphor for our own lives.

It took courage for Moses to return to Egypt and ask Pharaoh to let his people go. It took a long time and many plagues for Pharaoh to agree! Then not all the Egyptian slaves left with Moses - some stayed enslaved. To what are we enslaved that God is longing to free us from? How might our lives be different if we weren't enslaved to the journey of transformation is life long.

*Maybe the children of Israel needed to spend 40 years in the wilderness because they needed that long to let go of **slavery**! Some of them grumbled about how boring the daily food supply of manna was . Some grumbled that it was much easier being slaves in Egypt - at least they knew what to expect.*

*In what areas of our lives are we wandering in the **wilderness**? Are we learning to let go of what we are enslaved to? Are we grateful for manna provided or grumbling about it? Are we looking for God's guidance? As we reflect on our own wilderness times in the past have we reflected on the gifts we have received from them?*

*Where in our lives are we experiencing the **promised land**? Are we content? In **whatever place** we find ourselves are we learning to move our focus more to deeper relationship with God in the midst of all the issues and experiences of life we face? Or are we so focussed on what we are doing that we are missing out on practising the presence of God with us - wanting to connect with us... wanting to engage with us, wanting to show us how loved we are in the midst of all that life throws at us.*

PPT 9 As we close you may like to reflect on these questions and engage with God about one of them.

PPT9. Reflection at end. *Please leave this slide on*

What has touched me today?

How do I perceive God when life is tough?

How do I perceive God when life is good/ easy?

Am I practising thankfulness?

Am I awake to God's actions around me and in the world?

Talk with God about one of these - then listen to what God might be saying to you