

Wednesday March 10

Psalm 95 – we sang this on Sundays

1 Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

2 Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.

3 For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods.

4 In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him.

5 The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.

6 Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;

7 for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if you hear his voice,

8 do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert,

9 where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did.

10 For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways."

11 So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest."

During the first three weeks of Lent we've visited some sombre themes: LAMENT, FEAR and PENITENCE. For the next two and a half weeks let's change the mood a little. Three new themes: THANKSGIVING, PERSEVERANCE and HOPE. Let's start with THANKSGIVING.

In the Anglican service of Morning Prayer some congregations sing Psalm 95 as a canticle; we call it the *Venite*. Other congregations that don't do chanting have some good metrical versions they can sing. Because we have just confessed our sin and been assured of God's forgiveness the dominant note, rightly, is one of thanksgiving:

"Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song."

Put this note of thanksgiving into the psalm as a whole, and there's a whole lot to give thanks for, even if it's painful not to be able to gather together to worship at the moment. The God of Psalm 95 is a rock and the mighty creator God of all that is, a God who wants to be known personally by his people, and upon whom we can learn gladly to depend. We sometimes omit verses 8-11, which does tidy things up nicely; all the words to this point are of praise and thanksgiving while what follows is much more sombre:

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. "

As the people who had escaped from Egypt trudged through the desert on their way to the Promised Land, what happened at Meribah and then at Massah, sum up what the author of a book on the psalms has called Israel's 'sour, sceptical spirit'. In both cases they started moaning about how tough things were, they turned on their leaders and they questioned whether they could trust God to provide for their material needs.

Yes, it's tough living through times like we've had in the past 12 months. Some people have had it *really* tough, but for some of us, what's happened could be summed up in the word 'inconvenience'. So during this week, when our theme is THANKSGIVING, think about these words from the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

"In ordinary life we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich."