**Morning Praise @ Home 1st June 2025**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Readings Psalm 42

### Reflection from Philip

It’s a vivid image, isn’t it - this deer, panting for water. Here’s Bambi, in a bucolic setting, gently stooping to drink from a bubbling stream.

But is this the image the psalmist actually had in mind?

The writer of this psalm describes his being in exile, perhaps being hunted, in hiding, away from the place and people he loves. Away from the place where as a Jew he would worship and meet with his God – the Temple. He even describes being ridiculed for his faith.

So – back to Bambi. Is he calmly wandering down to the stream for a few sips of water? I think not. Think instead of a deer in an arid landscape, hunted by predators, its lungs bursting, its mouth dry, its breath wheezing and rasping out of its mouth.

Our psalmist is someone truly desperate. Far from his home, enemies are all around. He’s not on his knees in quiet prayer, he’s shouting out in desperation and frustration to his God.

The Psalms are full of people who desperately want and need to be with their God. In Psalm 42 this image of a deer, desperately seeking water, illustrates the psalmist’s intensity and need for his God - it is a matter of survival.

In another Psalm, 62, we read *‘O God, You are my God, earnestly I seek You. My soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land without water*’.

We also read of a similar thirst in the New Testament. In John 4 Jesus talks of a spiritual thirst. He speaks to a Samaritan woman whom he comes across at a village well, *‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty, but whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst.’*

In Matthew 5 we read *‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled’.* It’s a promise of satisfaction and fulfilment if we seek a relationship with God.

In Jesus’ final words from the cross, he declares *‘I am thirsty’* **(**John 19:28-29), reflecting not only a dying man’s physical need, but perhaps also a deep sense of spiritual need.

It’s easy to think of God’s great biblical characters – the likes of Moses and Elijah, or in the New Testament the Apostle Paul… of them all serenely living their lives in faith. But these most faithful people faced trauma and turmoil in their lives.

The Bible is not an account of good people for whom things went well. The Book of Psalms is not just a collection of nice songs or poems. The Bible is full of real-life dramas, of people facing crises, facing distress.

These accounts can help and guide us as to how to deal with our real-world problems.

This God we call out to – why wouldn’t he want us to be real and honest with him? To be direct and loud? He knows our every thought, but still he wants us to want him, to need him, to thirst for him.

In church the only prayers we tend to hear are those on the service sheet, the Lord’s Prayer, or the intercessions. But there is another type of prayer, a heart-felt cry from the heart – a cry from our very essence, or our soul, as the psalmist calls it, in verse 1. God wants us to be frank and honest with him – and to ourselves.

Tough times are the opportunities to deepen our need for God. But this only works if we have previously cultivated a thirst, a longing for God.

The psalmist is brutally frank with God. ‘Why have you forgotten me? He laments. He feels isolated from God. He feels abandoned. He thirsts for God, like that deer… God wants us to be frank with him. He wants that dialogue, not just of worship in the good times, but he wants us to call out to him in the tough times.

Even Jesus calls out from the cross to his Father ‘*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*’ (Matt 26:46), Jesus was quoting from psalm 22, another psalm where the author cries out in lament to his God with feelings of abandonment and hostility from the people. Jesus shows his sense of isolation from his Father as he carried our sins to his death. That psalm, like psalm 42, turns however to a declaration of hope and trust in his God as he declares ‘*He has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help*.*’ (Psalm 22:24).*

Psalm 42 gives us a frank dialogue with God, but we also read of a dialogue the psalmist is having with himself. The psalmist’s emotions are washing over him – feelings of despair and isolation, he describes them like breakers on the shore….but he speaks back to himself, he applies his real knowledge of his God, his faith, to not let his emotional despair and rejection lead to a downwards spiral.

He reminds himself of the faith that he still holds true. In verse 4 he recalls the joy of worshipping as a group of believers in the temple. The temple, where he went to approach and worship God. He confronts his negative emotional state with reminders of the true nature of his God.

It is faith in his God that slates that thirst. It’s his confidence in God’s true and eternal nature that helps him handle all his negative thoughts brought about by his isolation and hardship.

Many, if not all of us, have felt some degree of despair at times in our lives. It might be loneliness, grief at the loss of a family member or loved one, relationship breakdown, worries about employment, worries about our children, worries about elderly parents, illness, or just feeling inadequate.

I think I wear my heart on my sleeve. Sometimes I have experienced what Winston Churchill called his ‘Black Dog’ – dark moods. They can come and go, sometimes for no apparent reason.

So how can I nurture a thirst for God like that of the psalmist? How do I prepare myself for those moments of crisis and despair?

When I was younger, the general expectation in my middle-class upbringing was that you just had to have a thick skin and deal with it. What you might call a ‘stoical’ approach.

Psychologists recognised these issues some time ago, and developed treatments such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy that involve changing the narrative of your emotions – recognising that we can be proactive in how we respond emotionally to events.

Proper help, be that medical or with counselling, remains important for all of us when we reach a certain threshold of despair or depression. But the psalmist here is calling on something else – a spiritual remembering of his true belief in God, of worshipping at the temple, his faith, and he is honest as he calls out to his God.

As Christians, we await our ultimate reunion with God after death or with Jesus’ return. So our ‘temple’ might be different from that of the Old Testament. However, we can still feel spiritual and emotional isolation today just as deeply as the psalmist so eloquently describes.

The psalmist has been through the valley of despair vividly described in Psalm 23. The waves and breakers have swept over him (haven’t we all felt that sometimes?) but still he calls on himself to see how God’s love for him is enduring – in verse 8; *by day his love and by night his song*. He has not abandoned his faith in God and he knows God has not abandoned him. He is, we read, the ‘God of my life’.

For us today, as Christians, our ultimate hope lies beyond this life, but we can pray and call on the Holy Spirit, to go beyond rational thought and to implement real inner change.

So how can we cultivate this longing for God, so that when we face difficult or desperate times, we are drawn closer to Him?

Perhaps we need to ask ourselves what we really desire. What do we really prioritise? Try writing down a list of the things you really want.

-Happiness? Love and affection? Respect? Success? Health? Wealth? Where would God be on the list?

We can’t expect to have a longing for God unless we have cultivated a thirst for God. That comes from a daily engagement with God in our everyday lives. We need to be in the habit of talking to God, engaging with him. In our prayers, in reading the Bible. In everything we do. Even when walking the dog…

I am encouraged when I remember the promise in James 4: 8 ‘*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you’.* We are not in this on our own!

Where would God be on your list of what you really want? It’s so easy to be distracted. By work, relationships, money worries, ambition, even nowadays by doom scrolling on social media. But we must cultivate a thirst for God so that when we face a crisis we are able to call out to Him.

There is much in psalm 42 that points towards Jesus. In verse 9 we read ‘I will say to God my Rock…’ Something solid, dependable. In 1 Corinthians we read that ‘…they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.’ Just as in the wilderness, the Israelites relied on water that sprang from a rock, so we can drink from Christ, the source of our spiritual life, who can provide for us when we are in need.

‘My soul longs for you, Oh God’ we read in verse 1. Who is this God? Jesus ‘is the image of the invisible God’ we read in Colossians 1:15. In Jesus, we can understand and see the nature of God.

As we mentioned earlier, Jesus also experienced deep suffering, like no other. Those breakers also washed over him and he felt an isolation from his Father on the cross.

Jesus would have known this psalm, word for word, and in his life, he lived it out.

This psalm reassures us that it’s all right to call out to God, to question God – God wants us to be honest in our dialogue with him. That’s when we can draw on our memories of how good God has been to us and his promises for the future. We can call on these memories to strengthen and reinforce our faith and hope at times when everything seems lost.

Periods of doubt and perplexity are normal in the Christian life. Spiritual dry spells are natural and significant phases in our spiritual life – and growth. We need to maintain faith even when God’s presence isn’t felt. God is always near, his plan for us continues, regardless of our feelings.

I still sometimes have ‘Black Dog’ moments, and let’s face it, we are all very much ‘work in progress’ when it comes to nurturing a thirst for God.

I love the honesty in this psalm, but mostly I love how at the end, having wrestled with his emotions, the psalmist is still able to declare ‘Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Saviour and my God’. So let us live it out, as Jesus did. **Amen**

### Affirmation of faith

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession led by Rachel**

Lord, we long for your presence. As you have brought the rain, after a long dry spell, we ask that you quench *our* spiritual thirst and help us to see our daily need for you.

Thank you, Lord for your faithfulness and love that never fails.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

Father, please let us be filled with your spirit.

Help us to grow good fruit and spread love, joy, peace, kindness and goodness. Guide those in power in the ways of justice and reconciliation, to move all nations towards unity and peace.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

God of mercy, we pray for those who are suffering from hunger, loss, war, natural disasters or illness. We ask for support for those within our Parish who are in hospital or recovering from treatment, particularly Judy Redmond and John Roberts who were admitted this week.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

Finally, you call us to give with cheerful hearts, knowing that you bless those who give abundantly. May our community continue to embrace a spirit of generosity; to this Church, Christian Aid, Nigel Griffiths’ walk for Foodbanks or other causes that rely on our donations.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,******Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**