

## Victorian Chapel

2020-11-27 Devotion

By Major Deborah Coles

It can be easy for us, who are in relatively good health, to forget how many tears of grief are shed every day,

not just around the world, but even in your own circle of family and friends or even in your own life.

The impact of the coronavirus has served to heighten our sense of grief.

As a staff member at the Mayo Clinic writes, “Efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have affected people’s jobs, where people work, the way kids go to school and play, and the ability to gather in person with family and friends.

These measures have also changed how people shop, worship, exercise, eat, seek entertainment, and celebrate holidays and special events.

As a result, the pandemic has had a major psychological impact, causing people to lose a sense of safety, predictability, control, freedom and security.”

In a word, this pandemic has heightened our feelings of grief.

We don’t know all the details, but the composer of Ps. 116 found himself filled with grief.

After passing through this deep valley of grief, he sits down to recount his experience.

Let’s take a few moments to probe a little deeper into this psalm of sorrow.

We begin by looking at the opening line, “I love the Lord,…” Let’s pause here for a moment.

I recall the story, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, of a young English girl, Elizabeth Barrett, who suffered a spinal injury at age 15 which left her a semi-invalid for many years afterward.

Although she regained strength prior to her marriage to Robert Browning in 1846, she was hesitant to burden him with a frail, crippled wife.

Her love for Robert was beautifully expressed in her work, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, as she wrote the immortal words, “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.”

She held nothing back as she described the depth of her love.

In the same way, the psalmist says that to his Lord at the beginning of this psalm. And why did he love the Lord? Let’s counts the ways.

1. I love the Lord because he hears me.

Vs.1-2, “I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.”

When the psalmist speaks, the Lord hears. He pays attention to what he says, to his sorrow, his grief.

This gives us assurance, knowing that God never turns his back on those who cry out to him through their tears and grief.

What then, is another of the ways the psalmist loved the Lord?

2. I love the Lord because he saves me.

Vs.3-6, “The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came over me; I was overcome by distress and sorrow.

<sup>4</sup>Then I called on the name of the LORD: “LORD, save me!” <sup>5</sup>The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion.

<sup>6</sup>The LORD protects the unwary; when I was brought low, he saved me.”

Some tragic circumstance or painful experience had caused the psalmist to say that he was near death. Grief and sorrow were his closest companions.

The marvelous part of it, however, is that the Lord saved him, delivered him, rescued him.

Though overcome by distress and sorrow the psalmist testifies that the Lord stuck by his side.

That's good news for us. God won't leave us or forsake us. He is a specialist when it comes to deliverance, to rescue, to saving you.

It's no wonder that the psalmist says in v.9 that he will walk before the Lord because of his deliverance.

It's only natural to want to spend time with someone who stayed with you during any painful experience you faced.

What then, is still another of the ways the psalmist loved the Lord?

3. I love the Lord because he cares for me.

v.7, "Return to your rest, my soul, for the Lord has been good to you."

The words 'been good' are a translation of the Hebrew *gaw-mal'*, which means, "to deal fully or bountifully" with someone or something.

Frequently it suggests the idea of rewarding. We could say, "The Lord takes such good care of me."

Having been sustained in his grief, the psalmist then asks in v.12, "What shall I return to the Lord?"

In other words, how can I return my thanks, my gratitude? God has done so much for me, how can I adequately show him my appreciation in return?

The psalmist offers three answers.

1. I will proclaim his benefits.

v.13, "I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord."

What does he mean when he says, "I will lift up the cup of salvation?"

In the Old Testament, the word 'cup' is frequently used to denote plenty and abundance.

Remember David's words in Ps. 23, "my cup overflows."

And the word 'salvation' actually appears in the Hebrew Bible in the plural – salvations.

The psalmist uses it here to publically proclaim the saving acts of God; the numerous deliverances he's experienced.

We can do the same. Don't hold your praise to yourself. Proclaim his benefits to others. It can help you get through your own experience of sorrow and grief.

What then, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> way the psalmist returns thanks, showing his gratitude to God?

2. I will fulfill my vows.

Vs.14 and 18 he says, "I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people."

What is a vow? A vow is a solemn promise you make committing yourself to God. The vows we find in the bible are quite serious and binding.

We may want to forget our vows but the Lord never does. The psalmist is telling us that he can return thanks to the Lord by keeping his promises.

The writer of Ecclesiastes explains this idea of vows in 5.2, 4-5. "Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God.

When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow.

<sup>5</sup> It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it.”

To show your gratitude to God, fulfill your vows.

What then, is the 3<sup>rd</sup> way the psalmist returns thanks, shows his gratitude to God?

3. I will praise his name.

Vs. 15-17, “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his godly ones.

<sup>16</sup> Truly I am your servant, LORD; I serve you just as my mother did; you have freed me from my chains.

<sup>17</sup> I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the LORD.”

The psalmist declares his praise to God in appreciation for all his goodnesses.

But why does he mention “the death of his godly ones” here? The answer may be connected to his tragic experience mentioned earlier in vs. 3,

when he talks about the cords of death entangling him, yet God delivered him from death.

Whatever it was which resulted in such grief and sorrow, he gave thanks to God by counting the ways God has been good to him.

That’s a good lesson for us too. Our praise and thanksgiving ought to be expressed regardless of our circumstances.

Like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, let us make a list of the Lord’s benefits; let us begin with the words, “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.”

Also, think back over the vows of your life – those times you made promises to the Lord.

Have you kept them? Do you need to return to them and come to terms with one or two? If so, do that this week.