

## Facing the Future

Series: Summer Psalms

Date: 5 January 2025

Location: St George's Battery Point

Texts: Psalm 46; Philippians 4.6-7; Matthew 6.25-34

### Looking into an unknown future

Here we are, the first Sunday of 2025. A whole new year lies before us.

How are you feeling as you look towards this year? Are you eager and expectant, feeling positive looking forward to what the future will bring? Maybe you're not so optimistic. There are too many things up in the air and you're fearful of what the future might bring.

It seems to me that we can face the future in basically two ways - with confidence and hope or with fear and anxiety. This morning I just wanted to take a few moments reflecting on how we can move from fear to hope, from anxiety to confidence, as we stand on the precipice of this new year.

### God

The first thing to say is we need to look to God.

*God is our refuge and strength, The Psalmist writes,  
an ever-present help in trouble.*

*2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way  
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,*

*3 though its waters roar and foam  
and the mountains quake with their surging.*

God is our strength and refuge. It may feel like all that is certain and solid around us churning, boiling, crashing like the waves of the sea, but it's ok, because *God* is our strength and refuge. He is the solid ground upon which we can stand. Not your job. Not your family. Not your wealth. Not your iPhone. Not your expertise. Not any of the good gifts from God which we enjoy.

No God is our strength and refuge, our ever present help in trouble. He is unchanging amidst a changing world. He is the almighty everlasting one. The maker and sustainer of all things.

And the Psalm reminds us that God is *with us*.

Verse 4 reads:

*There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy place where the Most High dwells.*

*5 God is within her, she will not fall;  
God will help her at break of day.*

The picture is of the city of Jerusalem and the temple - the dwelling place of God on earth in the midst of his people Israel. But we've just celebrated Christmas and we're reminded that these things were but the shadow of the reality come in Christ - he is Immanuel, *God with us*. And he lives in us by his Holy Spirit, so that together as Christ's body and as individuals we are now the *temple* of the Holy Spirit. In John 7 Jesus says, "Whoever believes in me, rivers of living water will flow from within them." And John adds, "By this he mean the Spirit, whom those who believed in him we later to receive."<sup>1</sup>

That river whose streams make glad the city of God (v4) is none other than the person of the Holy Spirit.

God is within *us*, and what does the Psalm say? therefore *we* will not fail.

God will help *us* at the break of day (v 5).

We can face the future with confidence because, v 7

*The LORD Almighty is with us;*

*the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

When we are weak, he is our *strength*.

When we are afraid, he is our *refuge*.

When we are in trouble, he is our *help*.

In our Gospel reading Jesus has wonderful words of comfort for us as we face the future, which by definition is always unknown.

We need not worry about the future - because if God provides for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, how much more will he provide for you and for me.

Rather than worry, Jesus says seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, and God will give us what we need as well. As we order our lives around Christ, committing ourselves, our gifts, our relationships, our finances, our hopes and dreams to him, handing them over to him to use as he will, we will find he graciously provides all we need. Not all that we want or when we want it; not always in the way we expect, but he will provide all that need.

I'm reminded that God not only provides for us personally, but also for us as a church.

Christ's promise is that he will build his church.<sup>2</sup> In 1 Corinthians we read that although God delights to use people as workers in his field, his building, it is *God* who brings the growth.

Each of us is called to the tasks that God has assigned for us, but underneath, and through and sometimes no doubt in spite of us, God is at work to grow his church.<sup>3</sup> God is utterly committed to his church because she is both the bride of Christ for which he laid down his life and also Christ's own body.<sup>4</sup> So we can be confident that God will provide for us as St George's in 2025, whatever the uncertainties and challenges we may face.

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<sup>1</sup> John 7.38-39

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 16.18

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 3.5-9

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 5.25-27; 1.22-23

## Prayer

The second thing we need to move from fear to confidence, from anxiety to hope is *prayer*. There are two steps to prayer suggested by our readings. Step one is from Psalm 46.10

*“Be still, and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth.*

The danger with uncertainties about the future and our accompanying anxieties and fears is that they can overwhelm us. We can get so fixated on them that they come to fill our vision and squeeze out any hope. The Psalm shows us the antidote to this - *Be still and know that I am God*. On one level it's good to feel out of our depth, because we recognise our limits, that we are small and weak and all too often foolish. But that ought to lead us to turn to God. And his word to us is this:

*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*<sup>5</sup>

That point of coming up against our fears and anxieties, where we cannot see a way through, where the future looks dark - that is a point to stop, to lift our eyes to God, to be still and to be reminded of who he is; to meditate on his power, his goodness, his love. There are all sorts of ways to do this - out in creation, at home with a cup of tea, in worship with God's people. Different things work better for different people. But I do want to suggest that the Scriptures here are our primary resource. There we see God's unfolding story, his character revealed climaxing in the coming of his Son. But as we begin this year, my challenge to myself as much as anyone else is to come again daily to *be still and know that I am God*.

Step 2 in prayer comes from the reading in Philippians 4.6-7

*6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

The simple point is this: Ask.

If God is our God, the one who has promised he will provide what better to do with our worries and fears, our hopes and plans, with all the unknowns about the future, than to ask him who is powerful to answer?

Unsurprisingly Jesus has the best word to us here.

*“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

*9 “Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good*

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<sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 12.9

gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!<sup>6</sup>

Are you anxious, worried about what this year will bring? Ask. Bring it all before God in prayer. This year, let us be people who are bold and persistent in asking God to supply our needs with his good gifts! And let us be people who give thanks to God, recalling each day his blessings to us, and especially when we see him answer our prayers.

*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.*

*2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way*

*Be still, and know that I am God;*

*I will be exalted among the nations,*

*I will be exalted in the earth.*

*6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 7:7-11