

During the week some of you may have seen on the local TV news Bjorn Ihler speaking to students in Southampton. Mr Ihler was one of those who escaped from Anders Brevik when he attacked students attending a Labour Youth camp on the island of Utoya in Norway.

Mr Ihler escaped first by jumping into the sea and then hiding among rocks before being helped by the police. It is hard to image what his relief must have been when he was finally met by the police and wrapped in a comforting blanket. The turbulence of his emotions during the event and the sense of relief at finally being safe cannot fully be understood.

But perhaps we have had situations where we have felt vulnerable, even frightened and finally found a place of security.

In Psalm 62 this is what we see with David.

1. A leaning wall v3-4

In these verses we see something of David's situation. We don't know exactly what event these words refer to but the images are very striking, "this leaning wall, this tottering fence".

David was feeling vulnerable. People were out to bring him down. From a human point of view he was aware of the hopelessness of his situation.

As we look back at David's story we see how often this was true and especially having fled from Saul's court fearing that Saul would kill him. Throughout the time that he was on the run it seemed as if he would be taken and killed. His situation was often precarious and he felt fragile. In I Samuel 23:14 we read "David stayed in the desert strongholds and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph. Day after day Saul searched for him but God did not give David into his hands."

David must have felt very anxious, uncertain and fragile, a leaning wall a tottering fence.

I remember once at another church I was doing prayer ministry at the end of the service and a young woman approached me. As we talked I heard a long tale of woe. Problems at work, problems at home, so many issues and then she said "and to cap it all last week my dog died." She was very fragile, a leaning wall, a tottering fence. Perhaps we have been there or are there this morning or as you listen to this on download.

With David the issues were very much of the physical order where his life was under attack and he felt fragile. For us it may be physical. We may have health problems, or concerns about family or about our work or people who just get at us because they don't seem to like us or object to our faith. However, it may be spiritual. We may feel fragile spiritually, our faith is not as strong as it once was. Sin is often close at hand and we struggle to continue in the Christian life. Perhaps the rest of the family don't share your faith and keep putting things in the way to stop you coming to church or homegroup or whatever. It is not unusual to find Christians who are struggling spiritually.

How was it Jesus described the church in Laodicea in Rev 3:17, “you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.” Their faith was fragile but for them it was the lure of the world around them that caused their faith to be undermined and fragile.

2. God is our refuge v1-2, 5-12

David often had felt fragile but he found his comfort and strength in God, “My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him.”

And, speaking out of his experience, he encouraged others to do the same v8, “Trust in him at all time O people; pour out your hearts to him for God is our refuge.”

Why did he find rest in God and encourage others to trust him? It was because, v11, “One thing God has spoken, two things I have heard; that you O lord are strong and that you O lord are loving.”

David knew not just from hearing but experience that God is strong, strong to save and that he is loving. It was on that basis that he found his rest in God and encourage others who feel fragile to do the same.

I don't know about you but quite often in the Bible I read phrases and think that sounds nice but then ask but what practically does it mean? Then one for me that always comes to mind is in Eph 2:6, “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us in the heavenly realms with Christ Jesus.”

It sounds great but what does it mean to be “seated in the heavenly realms with Christ Jesus”?

Here when David says “My soul finds rest in God alone” it sounds lovely and we say yes I want that but what practically does it mean?

Let me ask some questions of the phrase which comes in v1 and again in v5.

a. What is this rest? I think David in the Psalm helps us to see what he means by rest. In v1-2 “my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I shall not be shaken.” Then in v5-6 we see very similar wording.

David seems to be speaking about finding refuge in God at times when he was under attack and so God became his place of rest and security.

If we go back to that situation from 1 Sam 23 we spoke about earlier when David was being hounded by Saul and was in the Desert of Ziph we read on that “Saul's son Jonathan came and went to David in Horesh and helped him find strength in God” (1 Sam 23:16) or more literally “put David's hand into God's hand”. Can you see what I am saying about finding rest? In the turmoil of his life even out there in the desert David found a sense of peace in God.

Going back to the Christians in Laodicea in their very different situation caused by their own action we read how Jesus said to them “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” This is our verse for the year.

But Jesus was saying look in all the trials and temptations of life let me in and I will be with you and you will find your peace and rest with me.

What David was speaking of from his experience was that in times of great difficulty there was a turning to God to find refuge and rest. As he turned to God he found a sense of stillness from which he was able to gain peace of mind and self-control and so draw strength to face the things that lay ahead of him.

It is the image of the person who is floundering in the sea and grabs a lifebelt or comes upon a lump of wood and for a moment is able literally to rest from their struggles and take stock of their situation.

I remember once being on holiday on the Isle of Wight. It was a damp day and Ruth decided to stay in the cottage and work while I went for a walk. I drove a little and parked up. I had my wet weather gear on and I put my walking boots on a set off. The rain wasn't heavy and all was OK. I walked for a while and went along a path which was taking downhill towards Ventnor.

I came to a road with houses on and realised I was on the outskirts of Ventnor. The rain was a bit harder now and a wind had picked up and I decided that it would be more sensible to head back.

So I started off and now of course was going uphill, which was more difficult. The rain came on very heavily and water was running across the path and the wind was now quite strong. Very soon, even with boots and wet weather clothing I was pretty wet. Slogging uphill in all this was not fun. Then I spied a spot where there was a bit of rock hanging out that would shelter me from the rain and when I got there I found a niche in the rock so I could also get out of the wind. I did that and had some coffee from my flask and ate a bit of cake I'd taken with me. I looked at the map and saw the distance back and finally renewed but still soaked I journeyed on. That was for me a place of rest, to take stock to gather strength in many ways so that I could go on.

Spiritually that was what David was speaking about here. God was his cave, his niche in the rock, his refuge. When in his turmoil and anxiety he turned to God through prayer and reflection he found a peace of mind, renewed strength and a firm footing from which to go forward.

As you think of the things that threaten you and cause you to feel fragile Jesus says to you "come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." (Matt 11:28)

Come to God bringing with you those things practical or spiritual which threaten to swamp you and in his presence find a refuge where through prayer and reflection you can find God's peace and his strength to carry on.

Rest is not inertia. Yes it may be a break from the pressures we are experiencing. Yes it is time with God to be in his presence but for the purpose of going back out to live his life but in his strength and

with his vision. In the same way that we can't stay in the cave of the niche in the rock we can't stay in the place of rest.

In Dec 1964, having come back from receiving the Nobel peace prize in Oslo, Martin Luther King gave a speech to his supporters in which he said:

"I wish I could stay here tonight. I wish I could stay on this great mountain of transfiguration that has come to me over these last ten days, but there are some nine-hundred-and-seventy-odd [thousand] of my black brothers and sisters down in the state of Mississippi, most of whom can't register and vote. I've got to go back to the valley, my friends!"

What is rest? It is intentionally coming into God's presence with all the turmoil, anguish and anxiety we may have and finding there peace of mind as we recognise God's love and strength and then the strength to move forward with God.

Just before I move on do note that four times in the Psalm the Psalmist uses the word alone. Let's recognise he is not talking about self help here. It is only God who has the strength to shore up this leaning wall and tottering fence.

b. How do we rest? What practically does it look like to take this rest in God alone?

Jesus would described is as "abide/remain in me" (John 15:4). In which it is very much an awareness thing of being aware of Jesus, his love and strength each day as we go through the day.

But going back to my experience on the Isle of Wight I want to suggest that this is about finding moments when we can, as it were, retreat into the refuge of God, get out of the storm, regroup with God and then get back out there.

You may not have heard of something called the third space. This is a secular concept which I think has relevance for us as Christians.

The third space is described as "the transitional gap between the different things we do".

So there you are at work and you are having a bad day. The boss has been on your back and some of your clients are not too happy and at the end of the day you feel frazzled. You drive home and immediately there are other needs and you snap and kick the cat or have a go at a child or your spouse.

The third space idea is about actually how people use that gap between two things to reset from the one thing to the next. When I am playing cricket and bowl a bad ball I feel bad and then under pressure as I walk back to my mark with the danger that the next ball is even worse. The walk back is the third space where I can reflect on what went wrong, rest and then reset. That is using the third space and I think it can give us a help in how we rest in God.

We find and use a pause in our day. It might be our usual time of quiet or it may be as we are going through a difficult time as with my walk in the Isle of Wight. Time as it were to withdraw, to reflect

with God through prayer and thought about on what is going on, to rest that is to recognise God's love and strength, his ability to help us in our situation and through that to reset, to go on but now with clearer perspective and in God's presence and power.

I hope this makes sense. Just take some time later today to think on those words, reflect rest reset.

c. When do we rest? As I have just suggested we can do it at any time. When the storm gets heavy we can duck into the cave with God. But again I would stress the importance of the regular daily times with God and also the importance of Sunday. The Psalms were meant to be sung as God's people gathered together, to encourage and challenge each other. It is as we come together on a Sunday and sing and pray and hear God's word together that we find his rest, the fanning of the embers of our faith back into flame. V5 "Find rest O my soul in God alone" we do that as we join together. So let's not neglect these God given times to find rest in him.

d. Why do we rest? When we did Lifeshapes we saw the semi-circle and were reminded that we rest in order to work. We rest to be fruitful. It is part of God's pattern for our lives to spend focussed time with God so that we can live his way out in the world.

David described himself as a leaning wall, a tottering fence but rather than collapse in a hopeless pile he found that God was his refuge, his fortress and rock and that through spending time in God's presence he could be shored up, strengthened to continue living the life God had for him. The encouragement for us is the same. When those storms of life batter us be they physical things or our spiritual failings, when we feel fragile and weak then the encouragement is to step into the cave with God to find there respite from the storm, to find peace in which to be restored, renewed so that we might, in God's strength step out into the battle once more.