

Fourth Sunday in Lent

22 March 2020 Morning Prayer, Second Order

A Prayer Book for Australia

On Video Leader & Preacher: Bp Richard Condie; Reader: Dean Richard Humphrey; Prayers: Ruth Wilson.

Gathering in God's name

The Minister reads one or more of these or other suitable sentences of Scripture.

Through Christ let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God,
the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Hebrews 13.15

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honour and glory and praise!

Revelation 5.12

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts,
who was, and is, and is to come!

Revelation 4.8

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
By his great mercy we have been born anew
to a living hope
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

1 Peter 1.3

Open our lips, O Lord,
and we shall declare your praise.
This is the day that the Lord has made,
we will rejoice and be glad in it.

The Minister

Friends in Christ,
we come together to meet with God,
and to take our part in the building up of his Church.
We will lift up our hearts in thanks and praise,
hear from God's holy word,
and pray for this world, and for ourselves.

[Today ...]

The Bible tells us to approach God confidently,
through our Lord Jesus Christ.
As we do so, we must confess our sins,
seeking forgiveness through God's boundless
goodness and mercy.

One or more of these or other suitable sentences of Scripture may be read.

God now commands all people everywhere to repent, for he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed, Jesus Christ the Lord.

Acts 17.30–31

I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no more worthy to be called your son'.

Luke 15.18–19

To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by following his laws which he set before us.

Daniel 9.9–10

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1.8–9

Silence may be kept

The Minister continues

So let us draw near to God with sincerity and confidence, and pray together,

**God of all mercy,
we humbly admit that we need your help.
We have wandered from your way.
We have sinned in thought, word and deed,
and have failed to do what is right.
You alone can save us.
Have mercy on us,
wipe out our sins and teach us to forgive others.
Bring forth in us the fruit of your Spirit
that we may live the new life to your glory.
This we ask in the name of Jesus our Saviour. Amen.**

The Minister stands and declares God's forgiveness.

God desires that none should perish, but that all should turn to Christ, and live.

In response to his call we acknowledge our sins.

God pardons those who humbly repent, and truly believe the gospel. Therefore we have peace with God, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

and/or

The minister may read one of these sentences of Scripture.

If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the perfect offering for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

1 John 2.1–2

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the perfect offering for our sins.

1 John 4.10

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8.38–39

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

His steadfast love endures for ever!

Grace and peace be with you

and also with you.

Come, let us sing to the Lord,

shout to the rock of our salvation.

Serve the Lord with gladness,

come before his face with songs of joy.

The Ministry of the Word

The Minister says

Heavenly Father,

give us wisdom and understanding.

As we listen to your Word,

may we know you better,

love you more,

and learn to please you in all we do;

through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 91

- ¹ You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
 who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
² will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;
 my God, in whom I trust."
³ For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
 and from the deadly pestilence;
⁴ he will cover you with his pinions,
 and under his wings you will find refuge;
 his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
⁵ You will not fear the terror of the night,
 or the arrow that flies by day,
⁶ or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
 or the destruction that wastes at noonday.
⁷ A thousand may fall at your side,
 ten thousand at your right hand,
 but it will not come near you.
⁸ You will only look with your eyes
 and see the punishment of the wicked.
⁹ Because you have made the Lord your refuge,
 the Most High your dwelling place,
¹⁰ no evil shall befall you,
 no scourge come near your tent.
¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you
 to guard you in all your ways.
¹² On their hands they will bear you up,
 so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.
¹³ You will tread on the lion and the adder,
 the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.
¹⁴ Those who love me, I will deliver;
 I will protect those who know my name.
¹⁵ When they call to me, I will answer them;
 I will be with them in trouble,
 I will rescue them and honor them.
¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy them,
 and show them my salvation.

The New Testament Romans 8:31-39

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³ Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Hear the word of the Lord,
thanks be to God.

The Sermon (Printed at the end of the service.)

The Apostles' Creed

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.**

**On the third day he rose from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father;
from there he will come to judge
the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

The Ministry of Prayer

The Minister says

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us join together in the prayer which Jesus gave us.

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

The Minister continues

Be exalted, Lord, above the heavens,

let your glory cover the earth.

Keep our nation under your care,

and guide us in justice and truth.

Let your way be known on earth,

your saving power among all nations.

Send out your light and your truth,

that we may tell of your saving works.

Have mercy on the poor and oppressed.

Hear the cry of those in need.

Hear our prayers, O Lord,

for we put our trust in you.

The Collect of the Day

Gracious God,

in order that we children of earth

might discern good from evil

you sent your Son to be the light of the world:

as the light of Christ shines upon us,

may we learn what pleases you,

and live in truth and goodness;

through the same Jesus Christ our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Prayers

A Minister

Let your requests be made known unto God.

In everything give thanks.

Sovereign God, Creator and Sustainer of the earth, hear us as we pray for the world you love.

- that the spread of coronavirus will stop.
- that leaders of nations will listen to expert advice then put into action difficult decisions to protect the lives, livelihoods and futures of their peoples.
- that agencies will be well resourced especially in places of famine, locust plague or conflict.
- that researchers will have insight, inspiration and innovation in developing a vaccine.
- that love will overcome hate, generosity replace greed and fear and panic subside.

Holy Spirit, in dark days, when we are afraid, help us to say; “my God in whom I trust, **you** are my refuge and fortress.”

Eternal God, “we who abide in the shadow of the Almighty”: pray for your Church, witnessing to the hope we have in Christ Jesus.

- that opportunities will be seized to speak with strength and power of your saving love for all into our culture of complacency, cynicism and self concern.
- that Bishop Richard and the clergy of this diocese will know God’s peace in their hearts as they respond to ministering to their congregations in new and different ways.
- that as sisters and brothers in Christ we will remain strong in the faith showing “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” in the face of “the deadly pestilence”.

Holy Spirit, when we are anxious, help us hold to the promise that “**you** will be with us in trouble and **will** answer when we call to you”.

Merciful God, we thank you for our many blessings: security, plentiful food, access to health care. Having been shaken by the sight of empty supermarket shelves and selfish behaviour, save us from preoccupation with our own concerns. Hear us as we pray for those we love and the communities in which we live.

- for frontline staff caring for people with coronavirus that they will have skill, patience and good health.
- for the vulnerable, the sick, the disadvantaged that they will have access to the services they need.
- for those impacted economically by decisions made for the safety of all that they will have financial support.
- for people, especially children, impacted by changed routines, isolation and social distancing that they will know your comfort and peace.
- for those we name before you in a moment of silence.

Holy Spirit, when we are frightened and don't know how to pray, "intercede for us with sighs too deep for words."

Faithful God, "our shield and defender, you protect all who call on your name," bring us with all your saints who have died in the faith of Christ, into your glory to live with you forever.

Holy Spirit, when we are fearful, remind us that "neither death nor life ...nor anything in creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus."

A Minister continues

Faithful God,
you have promised to hear the prayers
of all who ask in Jesus' name.
In your mercy, accept our prayers.
Give us what we have asked in faith,
according to your will;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Lord, you have given us grace to agree in these our prayers, and you have promised that when two or three ask together in your name you will grant their requests. Fulfil now, Lord, our desires and prayers as may be best for us. Grant us, in this life, knowledge of your truth and in the age to come, life eternal. **Amen.**

The Sending Out of God's People

One of the following, or a similar prayer, is said.

Eternal God and Father,

**by whose power we are created,
and by whose love we are redeemed:
Guide and strengthen us by your Spirit,
that we may give ourselves to your service,
and live this day in love to one another
and to you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Or

Lord Jesus Christ,

**send us out with confidence in your word
to tell the world of your saving acts,
and bring glory to your name. Amen.**

The minister says one of the following

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all. **Amen.**

Or

May the Lord bless you and keep you;
May the Lord make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you.
May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace. **Amen.**

The minister says

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

Some Possible Hymns Follow

Our God, our help in ages past

Author: Isaac Watts (1719) Tune: ST. ANNE

1 Our God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home:

4 A thousand ages in your sight
are like an evening gone;
short as the watch that ends the night
before the rising sun.

2 Under the shadow of your throne
your saints have dwelt secure;
sufficient is your arm alone,
and our defense is sure.

5 Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
bears all its sons away;
they fly forgotten, as a dream
dies at the op'ning day.

3 Before the hills in order stood,
or earth received her frame,
from everlasting you are God,
to endless years the same.

6 Our God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come:
O be our guard while troubles last,
and our eternal home.

God is our strength and refuge

God is our strength and refuge,
our present help in trouble;
and we therefore will not fear,
though the earth should change,
though mountains shake and tremble,
though swirling waters are raging:
God the Lord of Hosts is with us evermore.

There is a flowing river
within God's holy city;
God is in the midst of her,
she shall not be moved.
God's help is swiftly given,
thrones vanish at his presence;
God the Lord of Hosts is with us evermore.

Come see the works of our maker,
learn of his deeds all-powerful:
wars will cease across the world
when he shatters the spear.
Be still and know your creator,
uplift him in the nations;
God the Lord Hosts is with us evermore.

Psalm 91 – An Anchor for the Soul – Bishop Richard Condie Diocesan Morning Prayer – Lent 4 – March 22, 2020

Introduction

It has been an extraordinary few weeks. It seems that just a couple of months ago, none of us had ever heard of Coronavirus and now it is possibly one of the most used words in our vocabulary.

A few weeks back we were enjoying our churches just the way we always have, then for the last few weeks more and more restrictions on the way we worship, and this week not meeting in person at all.

We are seeing unprecedented things across the nations of the world and unprecedented things even in this little quiet little corner of the world.

You would be forgiven for being a little anxious; maybe even a little afraid; and certainly confused and stretched by all that is changing at such a rapid pace.

So, this morning I wanted to speak to you from Psalm 91 which is a Psalm of assurance of God's protection; which places all of our apprehension in the context of some eternal rock-solid realities as one writer put it "anchoring the soul in the midst of anxieties" (Mays 1994:297).¹

If you have a bible handy it would be great to turn up to Psalm 91.

1. God is our Refuge vv 1-2

¹ *You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,*

² *will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust."*²

Some writers think this Psalm was written in a time of war, when the nation was under attack. At the very least, a time of great anxiety. And these words reflect an assurance that God was in control, in the middle of that anxiety.

¹ Futato, M. D. (2009). [The Book of Psalms](#). In *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Vol 7: The Book of Psalms, The Book of Proverbs* (p. 296). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

² Ps 91:1–2 NRSV

The names for God used here: “the Most High”, “the Almighty”; are names expressing that God is King. He reigns. He reigns over the world. Nothing is out of his control. And because of that we live in his shelter; we abide in his shadow.

The image is a lovely one isn't it? The King Reigning; casting his shadow over his people. The King on his throne; gathering his people into his shelter, perhaps in his palace; a place of protection.

So that God's people can say: “My refuge and my fortress, My God in whom I trust”. (v2) The psalmist personally finding the comfort that God is like a trustworthy fortress around him.

So, here is the first truth for us, in the middle of an anxious time; be it war, or virtual war, (and many have spoken of the Coronavirus in these terms); We can say “I Trust you God” because I see your overshadowing of me and I experience your shelter.

While the world is in chaos, God is on his throne; God is reigning. None of this has taken him by surprise. He is the Most High, the almighty!

But the Psalm says more than this, doesn't it? Look at the second section. There are some bold claims of deliverance here.

2. God will deliver us vv 3-13

³ *For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;*

⁴ *he will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.*

⁵ *You will not fear the terror of the night,
or the arrow that flies by day,*

⁶ *or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.* ³

The snare of the fowler, like a trap for a bird. The deadly pestilence; that is disease and sickness. Throughout history plagues and disease, epidemics and pandemics have been regular occurrences. But the Psalm says he will deliver you and you don't need to be afraid.

³ Ps 91:3–6 NRSV.

We won't have to fear it in the night or the day (v5-6) the darkness or the noon day; that is – any of the time, day or night. Because he will look after us even if we stub our toe!

Verse 11 says

¹¹ *For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.*

¹² *On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.* ⁴

The angels will catch us and protect us from falling. And v 13 even says, kicking a lion or treading on snake will not cause any harm to the people of God.

God is pictured here like the mighty eagle looking after its chicks in the nest; covering us with his pinions; that is – the outer part of his feathers, gently caressing the young under his wing.

His faithfulness, the Psalmist says is a shield and a buckler. A shield to defend them from the arrows of the enemy that come from far away; and a buckler, which is small hand shield, to protect them from close up hand to hand combat.

God's deliverance is total. Nothing can harm the people of God. The promise in the middle is this:

⁹ *Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place,*

¹⁰ *no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.* ⁵

⁴ Ps 91:11–12 NRSV.

⁵ Ps 91:9–10 NRSV

3. God will show salvation vv 14-16

The Psalm finishes with God's own words directed at the anxious; addressing us.

¹⁴ *Those who love me, I will deliver;
I will protect those who know my name.*
¹⁵ *When they call to me, I will answer them;
I will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue them and honor them.*
¹⁶ *With long life I will satisfy them,
and show them my salvation.*⁶

God himself assuring the faithful of his deliverance; his active rule in the world. Did you hear the "I wills":

I will deliver; I will protect; I will answer; I will be with them; I will rescue; I will satisfy them.

And perhaps the high point of the Psalm; the final line: "I WILL show them my salvation"

A wonderful Psalm of assurance "anchoring the soul in the midst of anxiety".

4. Psalm 91 and COVID 19

I want us to reflect for a moment this morning on Psalm 91 and COVID 19. How are we to read this?

I heard a snippet of a preacher this week, encouraging his people to shake hands, to hug and to kiss; assuring them that they would never stop meeting in a large group; because he said, "the church is the safest place on earth". His message was: because God protects us you cannot catch Coronavirus here!

And if we read this Psalm, out of its context in the Bible we might come to the same conclusion.

After all it says "he will deliver you from the deadly pestilence"; "no evil shall befall you"; "no scourge will come near you"; "you can tread on a lion or a snake".

⁶ Ps 91:14-16 NRSV.

Does that mean I can dispense with washing my hands? That God will protect me from COVID19 simply because I am a Christian?

To say that, would be to ignore other parts of the bible. What about the story of Job? An innocent man who loses everything; his wealth, his property, his family, and is afflicted with disease. What about the observation in Ecclesiastes, that the righteous sometimes die, and the wicked prosper? (Eccl 7:15) What about the church in Jerusalem, in the book of Acts suffering an intense famine so that people didn't have food to eat? What about those in 1 Peter who suffer for doing what is right? What about the apostle Paul, who was flogged and beaten and shipwrecked, and frequently in danger, who was often without food, cold and naked? And what of our Lord Jesus himself; trapped, scourged and mocked; beaten and crucified?

No, the world even for the believer is full of suffering and even death. Make no mistake, this virus pandemic is a serious threat, to the world, to the economy, and even to our lives. And that is entirely consistent with the Bible.

So how do we read Psalm 91, as "an anchor for our soul"?

It is pictorial language isn't it? The very first threat is the fowler's snare; a trap for a bird that might ensnare us. It is not to be read literally, but as a picture of how people might be out to entrap us. The Eagles wings and feathers are metaphors for God's care. The Armour is not a literal shield and buckler, but the reassurance that God's faithfulness can bring.

So what kind of promises are they? Will God really protect us? I wonder if the clue is in the climax of the Psalm; the final line of the final verse: "I will show them my salvation". I think the point is: that our ultimate reality is beyond what we see and feel and experience in our world. The ultimate reality are things unseen and eternal.

The apostle Paul says: *I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us* (Rom 8:18)

It is true that we don't have to fear the pestilence; don't have to fear the arrows or traps or difficulties, or illness and disease; tragedies and challenges. Because God has ultimately got us. My life is His. He overshadows me. He is the King working out his purposes. He reigns, and I nestle under the shadow of his wing.

One final thought. Keen eyes and ears would have recognized that part of this Psalm is famously quoted; by the devil in Matthew 4. He tempts Jesus.

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.' " (Matt 4:5-6) A temptation to test God's faithfulness; to say – show me how much God's word is true!

⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

For all the promises of Psalm 91, there is no shelter for those who would tempt God and put him to the test. We need to live responsibly. At the moment this means to wash our hands and keep our distance from one another.

Martin Luther was facing the Black Plague when he wrote these words:

"I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbour needs me however I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely as stated above. See this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God."⁷

My sisters and brothers, we can be confident even in these most anxious of days, because our lives are hidden with Christ in God. (Col 3:3)

Our salvation is secure because of all that Jesus has done for us. Our confidence comes from Him.

⁷ Luther's Works Volume 43 pg 132 the letter "Whether one may flee from a Deadly Plague" written to Rev. Dr. John Hess