

Things we have heard and known

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Preacher: Steve Ellacott

[0:00] Hello everyone and welcome to our pre-recorded evening service for Sunday the 14th of February. This service is brought to you by Calvary Church Brighton. My name is Steve Ellacott and I'm one of the deacons here.

If you're not a local, Brighton is a city on the south coast of the UK directly south of London. Our congregation in normal times is about 70 to 80 people. And if you're one of the regulars, then thank you for joining with us in this virtual way, even though we would prefer to meet in person.

If you're not part of our regular congregation, then a particular welcome to you. I trust you will find something helpful in these extraordinary times. Did you notice the word I just used there? Trust. Trust. If the first casualty of war is the truth, then the first casualty of this pandemic seems to be trust. Who do you trust? If you're a Christian, you'll probably give a tidy theological answer and say, we trust in Christ alone, of course.

But let me challenge you on that. In actual fact, we trust in all sorts of things, don't we? I trust my car to get me to my destination. Mostly it does, but not always.

[1:16] If I want to find all the references to a shepherd in the Old Testament, I trust my computer to find them for me. Ultimately, I'm trusting the programmers to have done their work properly.

30 years ago, I would have used a concordance, but the same question applies. Is it accurate? Is it complete? Is it trustworthy? While I was preparing my sermon this week, I needed to check the sources of a couple of quotations.

When I started out as an academic some 50 years ago, I would have had to spend an hour in the library. Now I just click on Google. But thereby hangs a problem.

When I do that, I find lots of references. The only thing is they contradict each other. I have to give a bit of thought to which of them I trust, and that's not always easy to decide, is it?

When it comes to matters of life and death, the issue becomes even more acute. What would I do if I got a bad case of Covid? I think I would trust the NHS to give me the best treatment possible.

[2:23] But of course they can't guarantee to keep me alive. Some people find even that level of trust difficult. There is an awful lot of misinformation out there on the internet, you know.

Do I believe that the immunologists have done their work properly and the vaccine is safe?

Personally, yes, I do. I've already had my jab. I felt a bit ill afterwards, but nothing to worry about.

But there are an awful lot of anti-vaxxers out there. Some people seem to believe we're all being injected with microchips. And there are even those who claim the whole Covid thing is a hoax.

What planet have they been on? In fact, the ability of people to believe the most arid nonsense is quite mind-blowing. But are we Christians guilty of the same malaise?

Are we right to trust the testimony of Scripture? Well, it is mostly first-hand testimony, unlike these rumours that you get spread on the internet. And it has stood the test of history and personal experience.

[3:32] Just because it's not popular, that doesn't make it wrong. Actually, I trust all kinds of things and I have faith in lots of stuff. But I know whom I believe ultimately.

So let's sing the song that asserts that very fact, that in Christ alone my hope is found. In Christ alone my hope is found.

He is my light, my strength, my soul. This color, this stone, this solid ground, Filled through the glistens, drought, and storm.

What bloods of love, wonders of peace, When days are snowed, let's try and cease.
My content, my holy love, Heal the love of Christ, I stand.

[4:48] In Christ alone, who turned on flesh, The fullness of God, He left this pain, This gift of love, and righteousness, The stone, my love, and righteousness, The stone, my wounds, He came to save.

To love that cross, As Jesus died, The love of God, Was satisfied, The heaven and sin, On Him was laid, He did death, For Christ, My name.

And in the ground, His body lay, Light above my God, His slain, And Christ in God, In all this day, Far from the grave, He rose to the end, And as He stands, In victory, Since grace has lost, His grip on me, For I am this, And He is mine, Born in the precious blood, My God.

The hills and life, The faith and death, This is the love of Christ, In me, The life's the sky, To cry and prayer, Jesus commands my destiny, He will not be, No love of God, No scheme of man, And all the law, He found His hand, Till He returns, To the cause behind, Here in the law of God, So let's turn now to prayer.

Our Father in heaven, Teach us to put our trust in that which is really trustworthy. We do thank you that at this time of physical separation and lockdown, We still have access to news and information.

[7:32] All truth is your truth, And we need all the truth we can get. But we know this truth is brought to us by fallible human beings. Give us discernment to distinguish right from wrong, Light from darkness.

As we put our trust in the works of scientists to fight back against this pandemic, Let us not forget that they can only do so much. We confess that so often we've forgotten that it is in Christ alone our hope is found.

And so we pray that we will bear clear witness to Him at this time of darkness. Yet we do also pray for those who are fighting the pandemic, The health workers and the other key workers who put their own lives at risk to hold back the chaos.

And we lift up to you in particular those places where the pandemic is just another layer of suffering, On times of strife and hunger. We pray that you will strengthen the hands of those who bring relief and help.

And so we pray for ourselves as a church. Teach us to forgive each other as you have forgiven us, And to love each other as Christ has loved us. Let us learn from the Good Shepherd as we turn to your word this evening, Because we ask it in his name.

[8:52] Amen. So Ruth has recorded Psalm 78, which is the passage we're studying this evening. It's quite a long psalm, so follow it in your Bible if you have one.

After that we'll sing, Our God, our help in ages past. And then we'll turn to study this psalm. Psalm 78, a maskil of Asaph.

My people, hear my teaching. Listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth with a parable. I will utter hidden things, things from of old, Things we have heard and known, Things our ancestors have told us.

We will not hide them from their descendants. We will tell the next generation The praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His power and the wonders he has done.

[9:59] He decreed statutes for Jacob And established the law in Israel, Which he commanded our ancestors to teach their children, So that the next generation would know them, Even the children yet to be born.

And they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God, And would not forget his deeds, But would keep his commands.

They would not be like their ancestors, A stubborn and rebellious generation, Whose hearts were not loyal to God, Whose spirits were not faithful to him.

The men of Ephraim, Though armed with bows, Turned back on the day of battle. They did not keep God's covenant, And refused to live by his law.

They forgot what he had done, The wonders he had shown them. He did miracles in the sight of their ancestors, In the land of Egypt, In the region of Zoan.

[11:12] He divided the sea, And led them through. He made the water stand up like a wall. He guided them with the cloud by day, And with the light from the fire all night.

He split the rocks in the wilderness, And gave them water as abundant as the seas. He brought streams out of a rocky crag, And made water flow down like rivers.

But they continued to sin against him, Rebelling in the wilderness against the Most High. They willfully put God to the test, By demanding the food they craved.

They spoke against God. They said, Can God really spread a table in the wilderness? True, he struck the rock, And water gushed out, Streams flowed abundantly.

But can he also give us bread? Can he supply meat for his people? When the Lord heard them, He was furious.

[12:23] His fire broke out against Jacob, And his wrath rose against Israel, For they did not believe in God, Or trust in his deliverance.

Yet he gave a command to the skies above, And opened the doors of the heavens. He rained down manna for the people to eat.

He gave them the grain of heaven. Human beings ate the bread of angels. He sent them all the food they could eat.

He let loose the east wind from the heavens, And by his power made the south wind blow. He rained meat down on them like dust, Birds like sand on the seashore.

He made them come down inside their camp, All around their tents. They ate till they were gorged. He had given them what they craved.

[13:24] But before they turned from what they craved, Even while the food was still in their mouths, God's anger rose against them. He put to death the sturdiest among them, Cutting down the young men of Israel.

In spite of all this, They kept on sinning. In spite of his wonders, They did not believe. So he ended their days in futility, And their years in terror.

Whenever God slew them, They would seek him. They eagerly turned to him again. They remembered that God was their rock, The most high God.

God most high was their redeemer. But then they would flatter him with their mouths, Lying to him with their tongues. Their hearts were not loyal to him.

They were not faithful to his covenant. Yet he was merciful. He forgave their iniquities, And did not destroy them.

[14:40] Time after time, He restrained his anger, And did not stir up his full wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, A passing breeze that does not return.

How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness, And grieved him in the wasteland. Again and again they put God to the test.

They vexed the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember his power. The day he redeemed them from the oppressor, The day he displayed his signs in Egypt, His wonders in the region of Zoan.

He turned their river into blood. They could not drink from their streams. He sent swarms of flies that devoured them, And frogs that devastated them.

He gave their crops to the grasshopper, Their produce to the locust. He destroyed their vines with hail, And their sycamore figs with sleet.

[15:50] He gave over their cattle to the hail, Their livestock to bolts of lightning. He unleashed against them his hot anger, His wrath, indignation and hostility, A band of destroying angels.

He prepared a path for his anger. He did not spare them from death, But gave them over to the plague. He struck down all the firstborn of Egypt, The firstfruits of manhood in the tents of Ham. But he brought his people out like a flock. He led them like sheep through the wilderness. He guided them safely, So they were unafraid.

But the sea engulfed their enemies, And so he brought them to the border of his holy land, To the hill country his right hand had taken.

He drove out nations before them, And allotted their lands to them as an inheritance. He settled the tribes of Israel in their homes.

[17:05] But they put God to the test, And rebelled against the Most High. They did not keep his statutes. Like their ancestors, They were disloyal and faithless.

As unreliable as a faulty bow. They angered him with their high places. They aroused his jealousy with their idols.

When God heard them, he was furious. He rejected Israel completely. He abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh, The tent he had set up among humans.

He sent the ark of his might into captivity, His splendour into the hands of the enemy. He gave his people over to the sword.

He was furious with his inheritance. Fire consumed their young men, And their young women had no wedding songs. Their priests were put to the sword, And their widows could not weep.

[18:12] Then the Lord awoke, As from sleep. As a warrior wakes from the stupor of wine, He beat back his enemies.

He put them to everlasting shame. Then he rejected the tents of Joseph, But did not choose the tribe of Ephraim, But he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, Which he loved.

He built his sanctuary like the heights, Like the earth, That he established forever. He chose David his servant, And took him from the sheepfolds, From tending the sheep, He brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, Of Israel his inheritance.

And David shepherded them with integrity of heart, With skilful hands he led them. This is the word of the Lord. To the Lord.

Hark, come on, our hope in ages past, our hope for years to come. Our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home. Beneath the shelter of your throne, your saints have lived secure. Sufficient is your arm alone, and our defence is sure. And our defence is sure. Before the hills in order stood, o'er earth received her frame. From everlasting you are gone, and our defence is sure.

[21:19] The Lord, O'er earth received her frame. From everlasting you are gone, to endless years the same. A thousand ages in your sight, O'er earth received her frame.

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

Before the rising sun. Before the rising sun. Time like an ever-rolling stream.

Time like an ever-rolling stream. Will bear us all away.

We fly forgotten as a dream. We fly forgotten as a dream.

[22:43] Dies with the dawning day. Our God, our hope in ages past.

Our hope for years to come. Be our defence, while life shall last.

And our eternal home. And our eternal home.

Let me ask you a question. Do we learn from history? Can we learn from history? And if so, how? Philosophers have pondered this question, and the answers they've given are not encouraging. Hegel wrote that we learn from history, and that we do not learn from history. Perhaps even more insightful are the words of Jorge Santillano. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

[23:57] Yet history is important, because it shapes our cultural identity. There is a sense in which all history is myth. I mean that in the literal sense of that word.

Not as something untrue, but as a story that has created power. The stories we tell about our past are stories about who we are, and how we got here.

The author of Psalm 78 understands this very well. Who is this psalmist? Clearly some wise man.

As we've seen in previous weeks, not all psalms labelled Psalms of Asaph are by Asaph himself.

But this one might well be. It appears to be from the time of David, or perhaps from the time of Solomon. So let's call the author Asaph anyway.

And we notice that the psalmist actually calls his theme a parable. In verse two. What is a parable? A parable is a story which gives insight.

[25:01] Asaph writes, I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter hidden things, things from of old. What we have heard and known. What our fathers have told us.

We will not hide them from our children. We will tell that the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord. His power and the wonders he has done. Asaph.

He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so that the next generation would know them, even the children

yet to be born.

And they in turn would tell their children. Asaph has no lesser aim in view than to construct the future, to influence the course of the nation.

And yet he admits that the nation's track record is not good. He fears from his studies that he may well not succeed. Verse 8 reads, Asaph knows that his ancestors had often failed to learn from their own history.

[26:21] On the face of it, there are similarities between Psalm 77 and Psalm 78. After a prologue, both trace the history of the escape from Egypt and finish with the idea of the people being a flock requiring a shepherd.

Yet the mood of the two Psalms is very different. John Wood showed us ably last week, Psalm 77 is a lament. The writer pours out his complaint and then turns to history for comfort and encouragement.

But in Psalm 78, the Psalmist has a different purpose. This Psalm is a wisdom Psalm, as Asaph makes very clear in the first two verses.

Its purpose is analytical. It's not so much comfort and encouragement that the writer is seeking, but rather understanding and insight. He wants his readers to learn from history, even at the expense of some discouragement.

Yet he does avoid the bleakness of much modern philosophy. He is confident that God is still on the case, verse 65, that a shepherd is available, verses 70 to 73.

[27:34] So this week we will focus on the lessons from history. Next week we will explore this idea of the skilful shepherd in more detail. How does the Psalmist bend to his task?

There are actually several notable features about the way the author handles his material. All histories involve interpretation by the historian. Most often the writer chooses his facts to give his story a positive spin.

We have a natural tendency to make our stories about people, about our heroes and villains. We make our heroes out to be angels and our villains demons, ignoring the fact that actually all of them are human beings, fallible to a greater or lesser extent.

Take Florence Nightingale, for example. A genuine hero? Certainly. Medics think of her as the founder of modern nursing. You may not be aware of this, but statisticians honour her as well, because of her brilliant use of descriptive statistics for political purposes.

Both of these facts are true. She was indeed a great woman. But she was not above sometimes leaking her confidence to the press, or massaging the presentation of her data a bit.

[28:56] Ultimately, we are all fallible. But Psalm 78 is notable for its lack of heroes. Unlike Psalm 77, we read nothing of Moses or Aaron.

Asaph tells us nothing about Caleb or Joshua. And when he moves on to the time of the judges, he says nothing about Gideon or Deborah or Samson. Even Samuel, the judge who had actually anointed David, doesn't get way to mention.

There's only one hero in this psalm, and that's David, the skilful shepherd. Asaph presents him almost as if he is perfect, although we know, of course, from other descriptions that he was not. But there is a hint of a prophecy here. The skilful shepherd is what we really need. We'll think more of that next week. The second distinctive feature of this history is its very downbeat vibe.

There's a well-known song which exhorts us to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative. But the psalmist here seems to adopt the reverse policy.

[30:12] This isn't an impartial reading of events. It doesn't claim to be. A lawyer arguing her case is not supposed to be neutral. Her job is to take a side. What we have here is the case for the prosecution.

But having said that, of course, the prosecutor is required to be honest and not make stuff up. The historical facts recorded here would have been well known to his readers anyway.

So what we have here is a deliberate catalogue of failure. It can be important to celebrate our victories.

But if we are truly going to learn from history, it's at least as important to consider our defeats. Paul certainly encourages us to be encouraging.

When did you last read a Christian book detailing how it all went horribly wrong? Paul certainly encourages us to be encouraging. But he's not afraid to tell it like it is, as he did in the letters to the Corinthians, for example.

[31:20] Asaph has the same policy here. He appreciates that real encouragement requires realism. So as we dig into the central portion of this psalm, we understand that what we have is what we are promised in verses 1 to 8.

Not a mere recitation of historical facts, but a carefully constructed argument with a clear objective. That's why the psalm is not in strict chronological order.

Asaph is actually tracing back from effect to cause. The men of Ephraim, though armed with bows, turned back on the day of battle.

They did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law. It's not clear exactly what incident is referred to here. But perhaps it's the skirmish we read of in Numbers 14.

The Israelites had heard the report of the spies sent into the Promised Land. They'd refused to trust God and take possession of the land. God then told them that they would wander in the wilderness for 40 years.

[32:33] But then they didn't accept this. We read, But Moses said, Nevertheless, Asaph is clearly referring either to this episode or a similar one.

And he's perfectly clear what went wrong in Psalm 78 verse 10. They didn't keep God's covenant. The Ephraimites trusted in their weaponry, but it was useless to them if God was not with them. Why the specific references to Ephraim and bows? Asaph has his reasons.

This bow thing will come up again later. But let's follow the main argument through. Why did it all go horribly wrong? Verse 11 tells us. They'd simply forgotten what God had done for them.

They'd forgotten their history. And so they were condemned to repeat it. Just in case you haven't got his point yet, the psalm spells out this grim cycle, interspersing God's providential care with a depressing refrain of Israel's failure.

[34:29] The Lord had taken them out of Egypt. Verse 12. They'd crossed the Red Sea. He'd led them through the desert. He'd provided them with water. But what did they do?

They rebelled. Verse 17. Water wasn't enough. What about food? Verses 18 to 20. What did the Lord make of this? Verse 21.

When the Lord heard them, he was very angry. His fire broke out against Jacob and his wrath rose against Israel. For they did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance.

So the cycle starts again. God gave them manna, the grain of heaven. But they wanted meat. So God then sent them flying birds, quails we read in Numbers.

They just gorged on these until it made them sick. Verses 29 to 31. Did they learn from these lessons? Did they learn from what God had given them?

[35:29] Did they learn from the judgment of God? Not at all. Verse 32. In spite of all this, they kept on sinning. In spite of his wonders, they did not believe.

So he ended their days in futility and their years in terror. Asaph drives his argument home. Whenever God slew them, they would seek him.

They eagerly turned to him again. They remembered that God was their rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer. But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues.

Their hearts were not loyal to him. They were not faithful to his covenant. Sometimes they remembered that God was their rock. Verse 35. And then God remembered them.

He remembered they were just a passing breeze. Verse 39. But while God's remembering is infallible, the remembering of the people was just superficial.

[36:31] Verse 36. Mostly they forgot. Verse 42. The NIV translation captures the spirit of the poetry very well here.

All these time words. Whenever. Verse 34. But then. Verse 36. Time after time. Verse 38.

How often. Verse 40. Again and again. Verse 41. It's almost as though the poet himself is finding the repetition tedious.

But he rises to the challenge with a recitation of the plagues of Egypt in verses 43 to 51, which he describes rather colourfully as a band of destroying angels.

The result? Well, eventually the Egyptians did succumb to the onslaught. But it seemed that the Israelites learned nothing from this. Verse 42. They learned neither from God's wrath nor from his grace.

[37:43] Notice that Asaph slips in a new theme at this point. He refers to the people as sheep needing a shepherd. Verses 52 to 53. Poet knows where his argument's going.

Well, eventually God does get the Israelites into the promised land. Verses 52 to 55. Do things get any better? Apparently not.

Verse 56 says, They put God to the test. They rebelled against the Most High. They did not keep his statutes. Just like their fathers, they were disloyal and faithless.

As unreliable as a faulty bow. Ephraim, we've been told, had been armed with bows, but that didn't do them any good. It's as if the people themselves were like a duff bow.

A weapon that fails you when your life depends on it. And so as we move, as Israel moved from the Exodus to the period of the Judges, it was just a replay of the same old, same old thing.

[38:52] But it seems as though the poet has finally wearied of his task of spreading it all out. So he condenses himself with just one example. Verses 59 to 64.

In the time of Samuel, the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistines. 1 Samuel chapters 4 to 11. 1 Samuel chapter 5.

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1 Samuel chapter 5. But nonetheless, our poet avoids the nihilism and despair of much of this modern philosophy. Why? Because he knows that human stupidity, real though it is, is not the ultimate truth.

[41:03] But perhaps we've been lulled to sleep by this catalogue of failure. Perhaps the Lord himself has got bored with it. So Asaph shocks us awake with this bizarre simile in verse 65.

Imagine a recumbent finger. He's snoring, perhaps. Seems he's indulged a bit too much in last night's vino. His enemies are creeping nearer, increasingly bold.

Now is their opportunity. But suddenly, dramatically, the warrior springs to life. It seemed that he was defeated and asleep, but no. The enemies are beaten back, verse 66.

This action is decisive. When the Lord intervenes, it is as shocking as this dramatic scene. As C.S. Lewis described Aslan in the Narnia books.

It's not as though he is a tame lion. When we study the history of God's grace. Don't expect a comfortable narrative. Finally, Asaph proceeds to his conclusion.

[42:18] He's made his point at length. People do not seem to learn from history. But that is not the last word. For the Lord is still at work. And so the poet moves on to his conclusion.

And it turns out to be a political one. Recall that Ephraim, the clan of the favourite son of the favourite son of Jacob, was the first on Asaph's list of failure in verse 9.

They had turned back in the day of battle. They had forgotten God's covenant. Like Joseph's uncle Esau, they had despised their birthright. So the Lord turns his attention to Judah and to Jerusalem. Judah's city built on Mount Zion. But not notice to one of the great clans of Judah. But rather to the youngest son of a family of shepherds from Bethlehem.

Because that is what God's people need. If people are as foolish as sheep, then the only hope is a shepherd. We will return to this theme next week.

[43:22] But have we learned anything from this history? Are we any nearer wisdom? Have we achieved any insight? Or is Asaph wasting his ink and his breath?

What is the status of Asaph's hope that the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born? And they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds, but would keep his commands.

One has to say that the track record is not good. In church history, we see similar cycles to those described by the poet. Periods of reform and spiritual renewal, followed by times of decline. The same is often seen in the life of local churches, and sometimes in our individual lives as disciples. It is so easy to lose our first love.

So we need to keep returning to first principles. The challenge of history is to learn from the past, but not to be bound by it.

[44:31] Asaph tells us to study the past, not to repeat it, but to learn from it. The challenge indeed is both to remember and to forget.

So Paul writes, I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it, but one thing I do, for getting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me headwards in Christ Jesus.

That's Philippians 3, 12 to 14. In this verse, Asaph and Paul share the same insight. What is it that Asaph really wants us to learn?

It's not a catalogue of human failure. Certainly he doesn't want us to repeat that failure. Let's go back to his introduction. We will not hide these things from their children.

We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children so that the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born.

[45:51] They in turn would tell their children. What Asaph really wants us to learn from this narrative is not the folly of humankind. That's just the backdrop against which the events unfold.

The real history here is the story of divine grace. The way that in spite of human failure, God still cares for his people. And if we'd learn that lesson, what are we supposed to do about it?

Well, Asaph tells that too, doesn't he? Verse 7, they would put their trust in God. They would not forget his deeds, but would keep his commands. But even this isn't the final word, because God has, because Asaph has something to say about the way that divine grace operates.

If God's people are as foolish as sheep, then they need a skillful shepherd. Verse 72. Next week, we'll look into God's provision of a good shepherd. So as we draw to a close, we will sing part of this psalm.

It's a very long psalm, so we'll just sing part of it now. We'll sing the rest next week. And then we will finish our time together with those words of blessing from Jude.

[47:07] And then we'll sing the rest next week.

Thank you. Thank you. Listen, my friends, to each word, let my teaching be faithfully heard, parables hidden of old, our parents have told.

So let us not hide them, but speak in our turn, but wonder so that our children can learn the truth we are eager to tell.

The Lord gave Israel. Then children yet to be will pass on their faith to their family, so they will trust in Him and not let the memory dim.

Some have rejected God's law, turned their backs on the wonders they saw, miracles done by His hand in old Egypt's land.

[49:45] He cut through the sea and let none of them fall. The waters He made stand up like a hole.

The cloud was a guide in their flight, the fire a pillar by night. He split drops in the drought, abundance of water came flowing out, and streams came from the stone, and rivers of water poured down.

God made His word they defy, became rebels against the Most High, treating the Lord as a slave, demand what they crave.

Can God give us food like this drink from the earth, a table spread to supply all our dearth?

He gave us a river indeed, but bread is what people need. Then God broke out in flame, when they did not trust in His holy name.

[51:20] God's colds come and was given to open the windows of heaven.

Let's close our time together then with those words from the book of Jude.

To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you before His glorious presence, without fault and with great joy.

To the only God our Saviour, be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore.

Amen. May God bless you at this difficult time.