A Psalm for Summer

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Preacher: Rev Dr Will Storrar

[0:00] In the book of Psalms, in the 33rd Psalm, we read these words.!

This Sunday we are singing the songs of praise that you have chosen.
Some songs thank God for God's many blessings in our life. Some songs are prayers for God's strength to face the challenges that life brings to all of us.
Some songs ask for the comfort and consolation of God's love in our times of loss. And all your songs express our trust in Jesus Christ, who is our hope for the future.
The ancient people of God in our Old Testament also had such songs of praise to sing and sustain their faith. They called them the Psalms.
[1:29] In Hebrew, a book of praises. The Psalms, you remember, sustained Jesus throughout his life, in his life of prayer and in his public ministry.

Even as he died on the cross, he uttered a prayer from the Psalms. And so the disciples of Jesus have drawn on these same Psalms for 2,000 years as our songs of praise to God in all the seasons of our lives.
In those summers of life when all is going well, the Psalms give voice to our praise. In the autumn seasons of our life when our strength is waning, the Psalms teach us to trust in God.
When loss comes in the winters of life, the Psalms rekindle our hope in the God of life. And in the spring times of our life, as we look hopefully to the future, the Psalms remind us that our future is in God's hands.
They are truly Psalms for all seasons. This morning, we turn to a Psalm for summer.
[2:48] For the times when the blessings of life overflow and our hearts are filled with praise. Psalm 33 connects such praise to our view of the world.

Psalm 33 asks all of us this morning a fundamental question. What do you see when you look at the world?
This image on screen is a well-known NASA picture of the Earth from space. When it was taken, humanity saw our world for the first time as a tiny blue dot in a vast universe.
We gained a sense of wonder at life on Earth and a new sense of responsibility for the planet. That sense of wonder was shared millennia ago by the Psalmist.
As Psalm 8 says, When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established, what are human beings that you are mindful of them?
[4:00] Mere mortals that you care for them. But the Psalmist would also have seen something that the NASA camera cannot show us. Looking not from space, but from the throne of heaven.

The Psalmist sees the Earth not as a tiny peripheral planet, but as a world full of the steadfast love of the Lord. Is that how you see the world this morning?
As you sing your songs of praise to God? Psalm 33 invites us to see the world through the lens of love. The steadfast love of the Lord.
Psalm 33 opens with a call to sing songs of praise to the Lord in the summers of our life, when our hearts are overflowing. Praise the Lord with the lyre.
Make melody to him with the harp of ten strings. Sing to him a new song. Play skillfully on the strings with loud shouts. And then the Psalmist gives us the reason we should sing a new song to the Lord.
[5:17] Not because things are going well, but because we see the world through the lens of God's love. The Psalmist writes, For the work of the Lord is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness.

He loves righteousness and justice. The earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord. We sing songs of praise to God because we have been given a real view of the earth.

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As a world created by a holy God who is faithful and trustworthy. As a world characterized by God's love of justice and right relationships with one another.
As a world filled with the steadfast love of the Lord. Now that is not the world as portrayed in this morning's newspapers and social media.
There we see a world in the chaos of distrust among the nations. A world characterized by injustice and broken relationships of world filled with hate and despair.
[6:40] The Psalmist here is not asking us to put on rose-tinted glasses and pretend that it is not the world we see and live in.

Rather, the Psalmist calls on us to look at that same world through another lens. A lens more powerful than any NASA telescope. The Word of God.
The Psalmist says, For the Word of the Lord is upright and all His work is done in faithfulness. In other words, this is a word that you can rely on.
As the people of God, we are called to look at the world through the lens of God's Word. The Psalmist tells us that God's Word is a word that both creates and judges our world.
We say of one another, sadly people have said of me, you're all words, no action. Mainly my mother-in-law, actually. But when God speaks, when God speaks, God's Word is active.
[7:58] It accomplishes what it says. It does its work. In verse 6 and 7 of Psalm 33, we learn that the universe was created by the Word of the Lord.

God spoke, and all things came into existence. The heavens and all that they contain. One of the biggest conundrums that philosophers and little children ask is this, why is there something rather than nothing?
Why are we here? As God's people, we know why. With the Psalmist, we say, by the word of the Lord, the heavens were made, and all their hosts by the breath of his mouth.
I had the privilege, as a director of a research center, to work with leading scientists, among whom was an atheist who had this tagline on every email they sent me, a quotation from Albert Einstein. He who can no longer pause to wonder and stand wrapped in awe is as good as dead. In singing songs of praise to God, we are pausing and standing in awe at the universe with every thoughtful person like this scientist.
[9:28] But with this difference, we can give thanks to our creator God. But the word of God is not only a word of creation for the Psalmist, bringing things to life.

In verses 8 to 17, we learn that the word of God is also a judgment on the world. The Psalmist says, let all the earth fear the Lord, for he spoke and it came to be.
The Psalmist says, the word of the Lord judges the nations. God's word thwarts the evil plans of men from that first tower of Babel to the towers of vanity raised by today's tyrants.
The late rabbi, Jonathan Sachs, was often heard to say in response to the question, where was God in the Holocaust? God was in the commandment, thou shalt not kill.
The word of God stands in judgment on our wickedness on every page of human history down to today's headlines. We sing songs of praise as those who are awaiting the day of judgment where God will have the last word, righting every wrong, wiping every tear, healing every wound.
[10:59] And so, having called on God's people to sing God's praises and make music to the Lord, having given us reasons to do so by looking at the natural world and the world of nations through the lens of the word of God, a word that only has to speak and it is done.

the psalmist returns in closing to our relationship with God in the light of this word at work in the world of nature and the nations.
Here's what we learn. The people who look at the world in the light of the word of God trust in God to deliver them from disaster and death and trust in God to be their help and shield in times of trouble.
In other words, those who look at the world in this way are not spared the world's suffering but we are those who have hope in God's steadfast love because we trust his word as creator of the universe and judge of the nations.
It turns out that Psalm 33 is a psalm for summer. Those seasons in life when our hearts overflow with praise.
[12:25] Not because all is going well but because we know God well. We know God well through Jesus the word who dwelt among us full of grace and truth.

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With the psalmist we see this suffering world as a world still filled with God's steadfast love through Jesus Christ who entered into our suffering in his life and death for us and gives us hope through his resurrection and ascension to the throne of heaven where he ever lives to pray for us until he comes again in glory to judge the nations and make the earth anew.
And so the psalmist ends with a prayer. May it be our prayer too on this summer's day. Let your steadfast love O Lord be upon us even as we hope in you.
Through the word made flesh Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Let us make our prayer

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