

# PSALMS OF HOPE

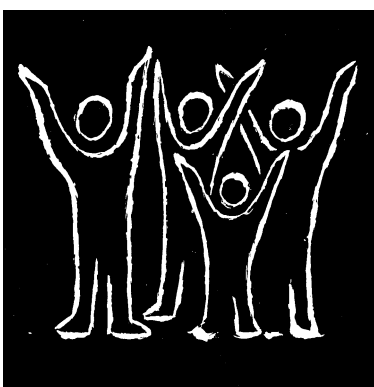
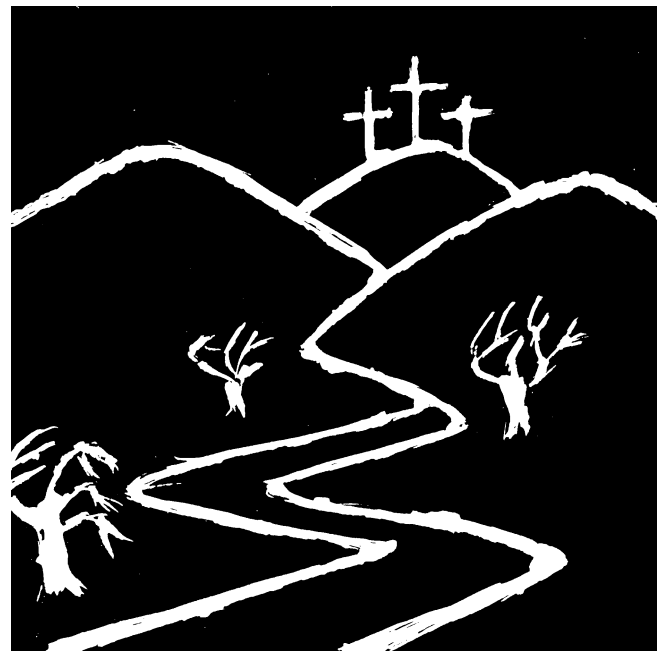
@UnitedChurchFerndown

## United church Ferndown's 2023 Lent Programme

### Introduction

One of the joys of being one of Your Minister is that I get to share in the highs and lows of life with so many of you. It is a privilege when I am invited into those moments to listen, to offer advice, to console, to advocate, to pray and sometimes cry! Sometimes I stand at the front leading a celebration aware that some don't feel like celebrating this week. Sometimes life is hard – We all have that thorn in our flesh. This Lent as we travel to the cross we recognise that collectively these are difficult times. Sadly, we actually have in a time of war, natural disasters, and national uncertainty. The shorter days seem to represent a darkness in our land but as the sun hangs around a little more each day so we see hope. Hope for a better tomorrow, Hope found in the future we share, but ultimately Hope in a god who makes a real and lasting difference to the whole of our lives.

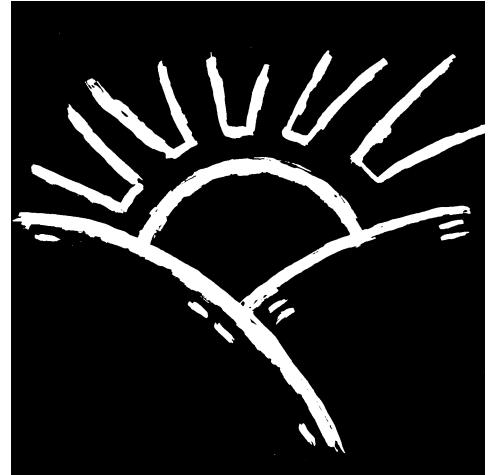
In this season of ups and downs, highs and lows the Book of Psalms represents a rich tapestry of prayer, praise, theology and lament. Some psalms reflect a texture of deep despair, other glow with a deep peace in the Lord's strength, still others bubble with an exuberant exaltation of the Most High God. They cover the range of human emotion and experience. What they all have in common is prayer, a reaching out to God from every imaginable experience. In this Lenten Series of studies, we'll attempt to enter into the experience of the psalms.



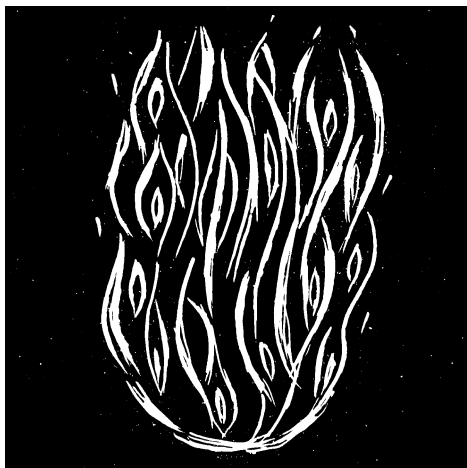
There are 150 psalms in this book, making it the longest book in the Bible. As I've pointed out it is the book of human emotions. Indeed, every experience of the heart is reflected in this book. No matter what mood you may be in, some psalms will reflect that mood. Most of us think the psalms are David's work. In fact, more than half of them were written by David, the sweet singer of Israel, who was given by God the gift of capturing the emotions of his full life's varied experience and putting them in beautiful lyrical terms. These became the psalm book or hymn book of Israel. Many of these psalms were written to be sung in public, which is why you will often find at the head of the psalm "To the

chief choirmaster" or "To the choirmaster, " and in some of our Bibles is the word "Maskil" which is simply the Hebrew word for "psalm." You may be interested to know that one psalm, Psalm 90, was written by Moses, and two were composed by King Solomon. Still others were written by a nameless group called the sons of Korah who were especially charged with leading the singing of Israel. Also, a man named Asaph wrote many of the psalms, and even good King Hezekiah wrote ten of them. As you consider the book of Psalms, you can see that in many cases the titles refer to the author.

Now the five books of psalms actually parallel the Pentateuch, or the first five books of the Bible. Those first five books were designed by God to give us the pattern of God's working in a human life, or in the whole of creation, or in the whole of world history, and God always follows the same pattern, whether with an individual or with a nation. He takes them through the same steps. And those five steps were revealed by divine inspiration in the first five books of the Bible.



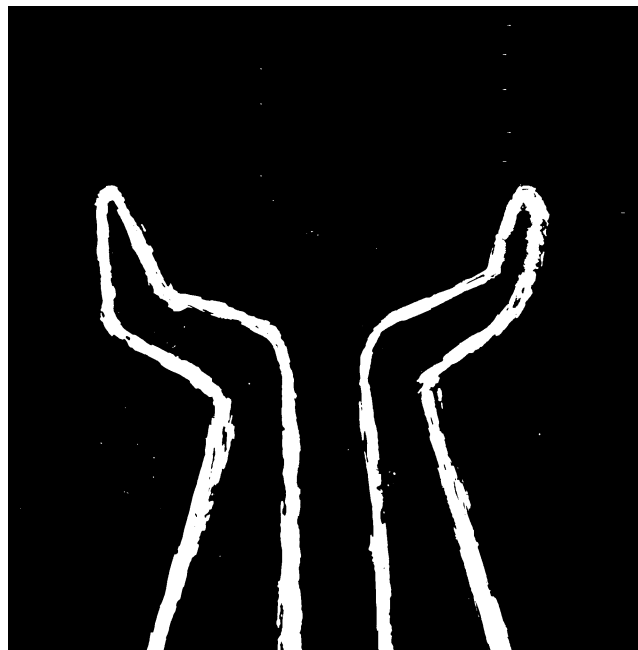
- Psalms 1 through 41 -- is equivalent to the book of Genesis and has essentially the same message. It is the cry of human need. It is the expression in beautiful, poetic terms of the human heart's deepest need. You will find that it follows closely the story of the book of Genesis.
- The second book of psalms, Psalm 42 through Psalm 72, corresponds to the book of Exodus in the Pentateuch. Here is the experience of a new relationship. Just as Exodus tells us the story of Israel in captivity in Egypt, the second book of psalms traces the same account. Psalm 45 is the psalm of God the king, concerning God in his sovereign rule over man and man's experience of God as king. And in Psalm 72, the last psalm of this book, God is pictured in his mighty, conquering power, setting man free from the bondage in which sin has enslaved him.
- The third book of psalms, Psalm 73 through to Psalm 89, corresponds to the book of Leviticus. Leviticus is the book of the tabernacle of worship, the discovery of what God is like when man comes before him and what he himself is like in the presence of God. And Leviticus is the book that reveals the inner workings of man's heart: we see his need, his deep consciousness of his own sin, and the discovery of what God offers to do about it. It ends with Psalm 84 that wonderfully portrays the continuous provision that God offers us.
- Psalms 90 through 106 make up the fourth book, paralleling the book of Numbers which sets forth the experience of human failure. Throughout this book you will find victory alternating with devastating defeat.
- The fifth book, Psalm 107 through Psalm 150, corresponds to the book of Deuteronomy, the experience of the renewed Covenant. This final book of Psalms is nothing but thanksgiving and praise, from beginning to end.



Many have had difficulty getting much out of the psalms. They read through psalms that seem to be filled only with David's cry against his enemies, or that it seems to be only a record of difficulties and trials. Many are quite troubled by what are sometimes called the imprecatory psalms, those psalms that speak with bitter and scorching words against enemies, calling God's wrath down upon them, wishing that enemies be torn limb from limb and hung from the nearest lamp post. This disturbs people. "What kind of writing person is this?" they say. "This doesn't agree with the New Testament's message that we are to love our enemies!" But I think we can understand even these troubling psalms if we will remember what the New Testament tells us about the Old Testament, that "these things," Paul says,

"were written down for our instruction." (1 Corinthians 10:11) And if we put ourselves in the place of the psalmist, right into their world, we will see that the enemies that they faced then are the same enemies that we face today. So, I feel the honest anger, the heart-felt despair, and even the verbal venting.

All the psalms are designed to teach us to do one thing -- to worship. These psalms reflect every human emotion, but they do so in a distinct and important way: they are emotions seen in relationship to God. Every psalm is written in the presence of God. This book, therefore, teaches us that as we express ourselves, our emotions to God – He comes back with His presence and in His presence, there is hope. So here in this moment, in this time of journeying to the cross, we will look again at these **Psalms of Hope**.



I read this story of a converted miser who had always been known as an exceedingly stingy individual. After his conversion, one of his neighbours sustained a serious loss. When the former miser heard about it, his immediate reaction was, "Well, they need help and food. I will go to my smoke house and get a ham and take it over to them." But on the way to the smoke house his old nature began to whisper to him, "Why give them a whole ham? Half a ham will be plenty." And he debated this all the way to the smoke house. Then he remembered what he had learned in the presence of God. He remembered that he had resolved then and there that by God's grace he would stand against all the evil qualities of his former life whenever they asserted themselves. The tempter kept whispering, "Give him half a ham," and the old man finally said, "Look Satan, if you don't pipe down, I'll give him the whole smoke house." Now you see, that is adequate grace. Where sin abounds, grace abounds much more. And that is the purpose of the psalms: to remind us that we loved by God, to bring us to grace, and to show us that we have hope.

We hope and pray that these daily reflections through this Lent will be a real blessing to you all...