

Psalm 11

1. *In the Lord I have taken refuge; how then can you say to me,
'Flee like a bird to the hills,*
2. *'For see how the wicked bend the bow and fit their arrows to the string,
to shoot from the shadows at the true of heart.*
3. *'When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?'*
4. *The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven.*
5. *His eyes behold, his eyelids try every mortal being.*
6. *The Lord tries the righteous as well as the wicked,
but those who delight in violence his soul abhors.*
7. *Upon the wicked he shall rain coals of fire and burning sulphur;
scorching wind shall be their portion to drink.*
8. *For the Lord is righteous; he loves righteous deeds,
and those who are upright shall behold his face.*

Refrain

For the Lord is righteous,
and **those who are upright shall behold his face.**

Psalm 11 is a song of confidence, the work of an unknown refugee, who sought sanctuary in the temple.

The wicked are on the warpath, and he is advised by his friends to run away to the mountains, because justice and right dealing, the foundation of a stable society, are destroyed. A similar thought occurs in Amos:

'Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood, and bring righteousness to the ground!
The righteous are helpless.

The psalmist sees his situation as a denial of his trust in God. Instead, he comes to the temple to wait for the revelation of God, and hopes that it will happen. He understands the nature of God, who is present in the temple with his people and who is also enthroned as judge above the earth. He tests people's behaviour, and his judgement is described as a volcanic fire, like the one which destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis:

'Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulphur and fire from the Lord out of heaven.'

There was also the wind from the desert, the sirocco, which can kill the spring grass, as in Psalm 90:

'You sweep them away like a dream; they fade away suddenly like the grass.
In the morning it is green and flourishes; in the evening it is dried up and withered.'
The scorching wind also torments Jonah.

Portion or cup (v.7) probably refers to the practice of trial by ordeal, where the accused was given a cup of sacred liquid to drink. If guilty, that person was destroyed by it.

The reward of the upright will be fellowship with God and the possibility of seeing God's face, as in Psalm 27:

'My heart tells of your word, "Seek my face."

Your face, Lord, I will seek.'

This refers to entering the sanctuary, but also to communion with God and the awareness of being accepted by him.

We are faced with many problems in the world today, violence in the streets, crimes, some of which are not solved, shootings and stabbings, and punishments, which we sometimes feel are too lenient for the severity of the act, aggression and rudeness, appalling comments on "social media." We have great difficulty in finding a solution to some of our problems, for example, the question of refugees making dangerous journeys in inadequate boats, many of them fleeing dangerous conditions in their own countries.

What can we do? Should we run away from these problems, as the friends of the psalmist advised him to do and "hide behind the sofa"? Should we refuse to have anything to do with the internet or watch only "nice" things on television?

Or should we try to stand up to those, who are violent, and behave in the same way? What about v.6?

'The Lord tries the righteous as well as the wicked,
but those who delight in violence his soul abhors.'

Violence tends to lead to more violence.

Or should we rather trust that God is present among us wherever we are and believe that he is in control? We are in the world and in the middle of all the mess. The psalmist urges us to choose the way of God, to be people of love and not people of hate, to be compassionate, to seek to serve others, as Christ did, summed up in v.8:

'For the Lord is righteous; he loves righteous deeds,
and those who are upright shall behold his face,'

Following the way of God does not mean being "soft". It requires steadfastness of will and discipline, but also a realisation that God is alongside us, holding us up and surrounding us at all times with his love.

Prayer

Almighty God,
whose only Son has opened for us
a new and living way into your presence:
give us pure hearts and steadfast wills
to worship you in spirit and in truth;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

(Collect for Trinity 14)

