

In the middle of June, Waiouru is not a place you want to be up to your chest in mud. {slide 2}  
It's an experience I've had courtesy of the New Zealand army.

On a very frosty morning the fire department filled a series of trenches known as mud gully with tens of thousands of litres of water just to add some extra 'fun' to the experience....  
We had to navigate mud gully again and again as part of our training. Wading through that mud was exhausting.

Psalm 40 opens with a vivid image of thick mud. {slide 3}

I want to open this series with Psalm 40 because it is so real, and honest. For some of us, 2021 felt like a kick in the guts. We endured hard times. For some of us 2022 is already looking like we're standing in mud up to our ankles, knees or necks. In the troubles that come our way in 2022, and surely they will, we have a wonderful God we can turn to, a wonderful God we can share with others. {slide 4} We have a God who is good to save, a God who we must respond to.

Its not an easy Psalm, let's pray and Ask for God's help as we open it together now.

### **Pray**

i) *God is Good to save*

a) *He has saved in the past*

{slide 5} The Psalmist, identified here as King David, has faced troubles in his life.

He's experienced personal lows.

He's experienced the depths of despair as a father, king, and ruler. In every sphere David has hurt.

He knew what it was to sink into the depths of the mire.

Psalm 40 is written in one of those boggy, thick claggy mud moments of life, the kind of moment he's had before.

He's looking back into the past and he describes, what he felt like. It was like being in a pit v.2. The Hebrew mind goes to the place of death, to Sheol. Life is so bad, so tough, it feels as if he is dying, like his very life is ebbing away.

This pit is repulsive; it's slimy. Filled with a flood of mud.

This isn't the nice cool, gentle mud of a facial rejuvenation pack, it is the mud that sucks down, it stinks, everything about it is disgusting. This is the sense of the overwhelming troubles that he describes in his past.

We don't know exactly what this boggy pit he's describing is.

The lack of clarity about what particular challenge the pit, this inescapable bog really is, is a gift. If we knew then it wouldn't resonate quite so strongly.  
I'm sure we've all felt like we're trapped in a thick mud which is dragging us down. Some of us might feel like we're there right now.

We have health issues, for some of us they are terminal. Some of us are battling crippling depression or anxiety. We've got children or grandchildren who are awkward or struggling, the target of bullies or plagued by their own insecurities. We are caring for loved ones with Alzheimer's or dementia. We feel lost and lonely as a widow or widower. Financial pressures mount as we see security. It's the stuff of real life, which sucks us down isn't it? We face times of trial.

In his time of trial, David offers a testimony. v.1 He waited. He waited patiently for the Lord, who heard him and responded.

The force of the Hebrew is more than waiting like we wait for a bus, or a parcel. This was an act of endurance or perseverance. He pushed on in faith in the midst of the tragedy.  
He is working out his trust in God while he waits in this metaphorical pit.

How can he trust God when his world falls apart?

What happens in the park **{slide 6}** when a small child falls and hurts themselves?  
There are some stoic toddlers, who kind of bounce off everything, but if they really hurt themselves what happens next? They cry at the top of their lungs, or they flee.

They cry out for help, they alert you to their pain and you hear it and you come and you scoop them up in your arms and you hold them close.

Or they come running and throw themselves headlong into you. They push close and you bend down and comfort them.

You remind them that even though they are hurting they are ok. They are safe, you are there.

Why do they cry out or run to you? Because they know you will help. You've done it before, and you'll do it again **{slide 7}**.

'He lifted me out of the slimy pit, he set my feet on the rock and gave me a safe place to stand.'<sup>1</sup>

David can trust, because God has saved him before, and he'd do it again. **{slide 8}**

*b) He will save again*

Having looked back at the past David comes with a new cry; v.11 "do not withhold your mercy from me.'

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 40:2 NIVUK

Once again, he is in the mud. He is deep in the pit. v.12 Troubles surround him, they are 'without number.' External calamities are present everywhere he looks. We understand that don't we?

Our world is a mess. COVID rages, and the fallout impacts us. We've got family overseas we long to see, or family away who are stranded and can't get back to us.

The housing market is like a runaway train, and the cost of aged care facilities just rolls along with that like another carriage. Political unrest, tension over mandates and vaccines, supply chain worries - there are plenty of problems out there!

There are internal troubles too. He's wrestling with the weight of his own rebellion against God 'my sins have overtaken me' v.12

He admits he is blinded by his situation v.11. His heart fails within in him v.12, but he knows one who is strong to save; who doesn't turn away in times of trouble, but who hears and comes close.

David anchored his testimony in God's faithfulness: God's has been close at a time of distress and given a firm place to stand. He's been placed on the solid rock, of the promises of the creator of the universe.

If our trust is in Jesus God has put feet on us onto solid rock. We aren't just rescued, we are established in Jesus immovable and strong.

Aren't we blessed as we wait for the Lord and trust him, and recount the wonders he has done? (v.4/5)

This same God, in his love and mercy bends down and draws near to us, so that even in our suffering all is not lost.

He has come close in his Son, the Lord Jesus who took on frail flesh. He lived out our human existence, he knows what it is like to suffer sorrow in this world. He has saved us from sin by bearing the weight of it to the cross where he dies for our rebellion against God, and in his glorious resurrection defeated its power over us. In the cross of Christ we have forgiveness full and free.

When troubles without number seem to surround us, we have an advocate and guide: the Holy Spirit who speaks to us by the Word of God, to bring comfort and strength. Hasn't God done wonderful things for us?

Speaking about his death, and return to the Father Jesus said to his disciples "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus takes this turmoil, and replaces it with something - perfect peace, a peace which surpasses all understanding. The world might be unsettled and raging around us, but we can rest in the Lord knowing that no matter how deep the mud gets, he will not let us go. Even in the death of a loved one, an investment tanking, the loss of a job, a disability or injury hasn't God done wonderful things for us?

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<sup>2</sup> John 16:33 ESVUK

When we are conscious of our own sinfulness, when sin overtakes and blinds us, how sweet are the wonders of God?

He doesn't leave us to drown in our muck. He hears our cry of repentance as we crucify the flesh, and call out for change. He releases us from the bondage of sin, the chains which shackle us to things and thoughts and actions which take us away from God.

'he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.'<sup>3</sup>  
There are no half measures here. There is no doubt about our future if we are living in Christ, we are blessed!

David was living before the cross, before Jesus came among us, but he cried out to the same God, knowing that he would hear and act.

He would make change. God is good to change us. He is a great God; merciful, loving, kind. He doesn't give us what we deserve, alienation from him, he draws near and saves.

This activity of God, this saving action demands a response.

We see the two options laid out in this passage, the two responses we all choose between. **{slide 9}**

*ii) We must respond - spurn or submit and spread?*

God has offered salvation. He's offered salvation in the person of Jesus. He has done wonderful things for us (v.5) There's a sense of John's Gospel when David says God's deeds are too many to declare, "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written."<sup>4</sup>

God has done wonderful things, he promises wonderful things.

Not only has God saved, but he has transformed the ones he saved.

He has given them a new beginning, a new direction, a new focus. v.3 David has a new song in his mouth, he has received blessings from God, and he has perceived what is most important to God.

v.6 sacrifice and offering you did not desire, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.'

Should we respond with religious service? Stick to the letter of the law, and do all the right things in church? Do we stand when we're asked to stand, and sit when we're asked to sit, trusting our form and ceremony getting things just right, just so? No.

The religious response is woefully inadequate. God wants our hearts. He wants us to desire to do his will, to have his ways written on our hearts. He 'digs out our ears' in Hebrew (v.6) so that we can have listening hearts and proclaim his goodness by offering him our whole selves.

We choose to tell of his wonders, the good things he has done for us.

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<sup>3</sup> Philippians 1:6b NIVUK

<sup>4</sup> John 21:25 NIVUK

We don't have to of course, there is another option; we can spurn him and turn aside, hang onto self-determination, and move further and further away from the deliverer. Rejecting what this good God offers.

We can join those in v.15 who mock trusting in God as foolish, and weak. Who long to see the faithful dismayed. Who call out 'aha, aha' where has trusting your God got you now? It's the pride and self assurance that's described in v. 4.

It's a path that takes us away from the blessing God gives. It creates a deeper struggle, and need to push and strive and strain. It's exhausting and devastating. The Western god of our time, self-sufficiency is proved to be impotent. To be poor and needy, weak and helpless, to be in need of a saviour, or deliverer is shameful in our world.

But that's who we are isn't it? We are weak, but the Lord our help and deliverer is great. When we recognise our great need we admit it, and ask God for help.

We, people of the cross, we Christians, haven't we admitted our great need? Not that we can boast in that! Without the grace of God opening eyes and hearts we are just the same. We are fallen rebellious people. We are people who have been neck deep in the bog of sin and shame, who have been delivered by the death of the Lord Jesus and who can echo David's cries 'I desire to do you will, write your law within my heart.'

We can follow his example and speak of God's saving work to anyone who will listen. To share the saving Good news that has been revealed to us by the grace of God. "I proclaim your saving acts in the great assembly, I do not seal my lips' (v.9) "I speak of your faithfulness and saving help.' (v.10) As we do that we honour God, we strengthen and encourage others, and we share the Good News of Jesus with those who don't yet know him.

As we come to 2022, not knowing what will come our way, but pretty certain there will be some boggy moments along the way, what testimony do we have from 2021? What words of hope and encouragement can we share of how God has rescued us, ultimately in the Lord Jesus from the power of sin, but in the tough moments that have come along the way?

Where will we seek God in prayer to expose to us the gods of the age we sometimes trust? Where are we tempted to replace right hearts with religion? **{slide 10}**

Let's pray and ask God to show us.