

## Unfailing love and faithfulness

Psalm 25:1 – 10, Mark 1:9 – 15

18 February 2018

First Sunday of Lent

Friday, was a bad day. I was conscious of needing God's unfailing love and faithfulness. I had precious little of my own to give. It was just one of those days – one appointment after the other scheduled – then unexpected extras like police, the builder, the roofer, someone who wanted a food parcel, doing a job on my own when someone else should've been there with me – on and on it went.

For most of the day I felt hot and bothered and God's faithful love felt very far from being aware of away.

And yet – there were moments; there are always moments if we can catch them. (That is why the spiritual practice of Examen is such a valuable one. Going over our day reminds us when God was near and when we stepped away.)

- One moment I saw God's love in the eyes of the woman who had got up the courage to ask for a food parcel – it flickered brightly for an instant and was gone – but it was there!
- Another longer moment was spent with someone who is doing a sterling job of parenting in the midst of the crap of life – I saw God's faithful love lived out through her to her children and family
- There was another flash in the hint of tears in someone who had been misunderstood. God's unfailing love and faithfulness for them was

evident but they were gone before I told them that.

- Then later two people saw me, who weren't rostered on to help, saw me struggling and rocked up; God's loving provision.

When I thought about it – God's faithful love was there. Even at the time I recognised those moments in my spirit; even though they didn't register in my mind. Thinking back I am able to praise God that he was with me; that God was loving me and loving others through me; in spite of myself.

Still I was pleased when the day was over.

I wonder what you think God's unfailing love and faithfulness look like. Where have you seen his love at work? Where in your own lives have you seen it?

The super-spiritual answer is that "It looks like Jesus". (We can trot that out very smugly without even thinking about it can't we?)

But of course – it does look like Jesus! Jesus embodies the unfailing love and faithfulness of God the Father. Everything he does comes out of the Father's love. Everything!

We see that right from the beginning of his life. Jesus' birth, life death, all of it – happens because of the Father's love.

We see this love in Psalm 25. When guidance is needed, the Psalmist confidently asks for it on the basis that God loves.

Lead me by your truth and teach me,

for you are the God who  
saves me.  
All day long I put my hope in  
you.

Remember, O Lord, your  
compassion and unfailing love,  
which you have shown from  
long ages past.

In the midst of human foible and  
failing, God's love is necessary and it  
can be relied on. We don't know why  
the psalmist is feeling anxious but he  
clearly is. (It may be to do with the  
enemies he mentions earlier and later  
in the psalm. Or it may be lingering  
guilt from his youth.)

Do not remember the  
rebellious sins of my youth.  
Remember me in the light of  
your unfailing love,  
for you are merciful, O Lord.

By the way it's good to notice that  
when we do feel anxious or stressed  
or just plain down, it is often the  
bogies of the past that have risen up  
to haunt us. Those bogies may be our  
own sin or they may come from sin  
committed against us.

In such times we might paraphrase the  
psalmist: "Don't remember the  
rubbish of my past. Remember who  
you are God. Remember your  
character. That's what will get me  
through."

Having acknowledged the past, the  
writer continues to recall and ponder  
on God's character:

The Lord is good and does  
what is right;  
he shows the proper path to  
those who go astray.  
He leads the humble in doing  
right,  
teaching them his way.

Our reading from the psalm is  
completed with determination and  
with positivity. The poet wants to be  
among those who belong to the Lord.  
That is his aspiration. My version (NLT)  
has it like this:

The Lord leads with unfailing  
love and faithfulness  
all who keep his covenant  
and obey his demands.

This is how the Message puts it:  
From now on every road you  
travel  
Will take you to God.  
Follow the Covenant signs;  
Read the charted directions.

Very matter of fact. Fear and anxiety  
are addressed. It's ok. Put your trust in  
God and do what God says. You are on  
the highway to God.

Now let's take a look at Jesus and the  
wonderful affirmation he received  
from God.

Jesus was a Jew. He had a culture and  
religious heritage that provided a  
fabulous foundation to experience and  
to reveal the love of God. Jesus had  
read to him as a child and now knew  
for himself the Hebrew Bible stories,  
stories of his ancestors, as examples  
for him to follow. Jesus knew how  
they stuffed up and that God had  
persevered with them anyway.

Even more importantly, Jesus knew  
the love of God, of his Dad, for  
himself. He had the foundational  
stories but he didn't rely just on them.  
He also relied on the closeness of his  
own relationship with God.

We need both don't we? We need the  
Bible and the learning and instruction  
that comes with it. And we need to

experience God's loving presence and empowering. We need Word and Spirit too.

At the outset of Jesus' ministry God was pleased to remind Jesus that God loved him deeply.

"You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy."

Imagine hearing that! Imagine Almighty God, Sovereign of the universe, ruler and judge of all people, sustainer of all that was and is and is to come; imagine this God saying to you:

"You are my dearly loved child, and you bring me great joy."

Maybe that is too hard just now. Maybe everything that is going on, is dragging you down – like me on Friday – maybe you could use some help. We all need perspective at times. Maybe this first Sunday of Lent is a great time to remind ourselves just how much God loves us.

Let's listen to "Your love is extravagant" by Casting Crowns.  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DqLLAVm0cg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DqLLAVm0cg)

I'm trusting that was a great reminder and that God spoke to you.

Next time everything is getting on top of you, I invite you to remind yourself of God's faithful love and unfailing mercy – not just in a general sense but of his love and mercy towards you! You might like to think of the rubbish that is happening and ask God to show you the moments of his love even in the rubbish; moments of love you may have missed at the time.

Let's pray:

Lord your love is extravagant. Your unfailing love, displayed in Jesus, is totally faithful to us. You will never let us down.

I invite you to say aloud:

I am God's dearly loved child.

I bring God great joy!

It's true!

Reflection questions:

1. How might it have felt for Jesus to know without a doubt that he was completely loved by God; by his Dad?
2. In what ways have you experienced God's faithful love in the past? What does God's love seem like for you now?
3. What difference might it make in your life if you knew that you bring God joy? Let me assure that you do!