

B/C/H
H.C. 22.11.15

PSALM 93
JOHN 18:33-37

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

Who's in charge? As a child of about 9 or 10 years old, I started a club for my friends. We had badges and rules and competitions and awards. It was my idea. I was in charge. Early evidence of leanings towards a future leadership position, maybe! Also early experience of what happens if you try to tell people what to do the don't agree. The club didn't last long.

Who's in charge? Look at the government of listen to 'Yesterday in Parliament' and you could wonder. Is it the Prime Minister? Or is it his advisors? Is the Speaker of the House of Commons, who gets to decide who can say something? Is it the House of Lords, who are in trouble for overturning a government Bill?

From the first days until now, human beings have wanted to be in charge, or at least to feel as if they're in control of their situation. But what happens when something goes wrong: like bombs in France, or illness or floods or poverty.

Who's in charge? The Bible wants us to see God as being in charge, for two reasons- **humility and hope.**

The Lord reigns! That's the confident first line of Psalm 93. This is the first psalm of a whole group that show God as King. Here he is '*robed in majesty*' (v.1). God is the one who has strength, who has *firmly established* the earth so that *it cannot be moved* (v.1) and who has a throne that was also *established long ago* (v.1). This God is not a new, upstart king who will be here today and gone tomorrow. He is *from all eternity* (v.2) If the world was established a long time ago, then so was his kingship. They go hand in hand.

If we were wondering about his power then here we get a contrast between the power of the seas and the power of God himself. To the Jews, the waters of the seas were about chaos and wildness and untamed power, danger. I'm sure we've all experienced the power and awe of a stormy sea somewhere, waves lashing the shore, battering the rocks, and seen the terror of the sea on the TV when it breaks the boundaries and floods the nearby streets and towns.

Here we have a picture of the seas lifting up their pounding waves but what do we find? *Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea- the Lord on high is mighty.*(v.3-4) Finally there's a statement about God's statutes, his affirmations which stand firm, for endless days. (v.5) This is not just a God armed with powerful strength, but with character and integrity and love.

Who's in charge? 'The Lord reigns'. It's there for humility and for hope. **Humility** – you only get security in the world when you acknowledge the stability of God as ruler and when you *act* as if he is ruler, as if you believe his statutes are good and you do them.

Hope – this psalm is like an announcement – a runner coming to Jerusalem to people who are despondent and hear a message of victory in hard times. All the repetition of words and phrases emphasise the point: *he is robed in majesty, the lord is robed in majesty....the world was established, your throne was established....the seas have lifted up, the seas have lifted up, the seas have lifted up their pounding waves.....* and when you think they're going to come crashing down on you- *mightier than the breakers of the sea, the Lord on high is mighty* (v.4)

If you don't get the message the first time, then reading the next 7 or 8 psalms will underline it.

Psalm 95 – the great king above all gods...in his hand are the depths of the earth and the sea is his

Psalm 96 – the Lord is to be feared above all gods,...the lord reigns...worship him in the splendour of his holiness

Psalm 97 – the Lord reigns....most high over all the earth

Psalm 98 – the whole of creation joins in praise

Psalm 99 – The Lord reigns

Psalm 100 – Know that the Lord he is God, he has made us and we are his

Who's in charge? The Lord reigns. Don't get above yourselves, don't get despondent. We need **humility and hope.**

But then the scene picked out for us by the people who compile the lectionary for this Sunday changes dramatically. A picture of power and majesty, in the Psalm gives way to Jesus, held as a criminal in front of the Roman Governor.

Are you the king of the Jews? asks Pilate (John 18v.33)

It doesn't really look like it at this stage. **Who's in charge?** Another politician, another crowd of people who have to be quietened down, another group of hierarchy who seem to be trying to overturn the usual way of doing things. Pilate is not bothered about the religious accusations but if Jesus claims to be a king, that's something different. He can't ignore it.

But the politician who has perhaps become weary with compromises and deceptions and trying to get to the truth and the reality of a situation, just about gives up. Jesus wants him to enter a more personal conversation. *'Is that your own idea?'* (v. 34) but Pilate can't let go. Jesus talks about a kingdom of truth instead of lies. Did that not seem attractive? But Pilate can't take it. He sentences Jesus to death.

Who's in charge? Pilate has the robes and throne of majesty whilst Jesus will shortly be naked, battered, bruised and bleeding. Pilate is the judge and Jesus is the prisoner. Yet the prisoner offers freedom to the judge. All the keeping up appearances and trying to please people and balancing forces and rules that don't seem right and illusions of things that seem to promise everything but don't deliver....Jesus offers a new way. Pilate can't take it. Souls shrivel up as people stop looking for a truthful way to live. Jesus offers it.

Even then, once condemned, he goes firmly to the cross. The Jews would say he was under the curse of God but in fact it is by his very death that there is salvation.

The time of Jesus' death was a time of great darkness – religious men compromise and reject God; Peter, a friend, leader of a new community, can't stand up for his beliefs; and God seems not to be there when you need him. All those things still happen today.

Who's in charge? Jesus brings **humility** – even the Roman governor needs to see he can be pushed around and doesn't have the answers. Even the people held as prisoners unfairly can be **hopeful**.

How does this help us?

1. People in Paris are doing what they can to show *"we will not have our way of life threatened"* but these people have been made to feel out of control – perhaps that's almost the biggest shock. So they – we- try to regain the upper

hand when all falls apart. There are times when, much as we try to show care and support and to help and protect, we may have to admit we're not in charge. Perhaps occasionally it's in those times that God has the best chance to work. In those times we are closer to that reality, that truth that Pilate ignored, that human beings are not in control as much as they'd like to think. Perhaps at those times we are more likely to throw ourselves on the mercy of God and say *'Help!' 'My power is made perfect in your weakness'* (2 Cor 12:9) says Paul

When God is in charge, we are forced to humility.

2. When God is in charge there is hope even in darkness. One of the Taize chants occasionally sung is *Ubi caritas et amor, deus tibi est...* 'where there is love and charity, there is God'. When we see rescue workers pulling people out of rubble or comforting the bereaved, where we see care for those who are lonely or struggling to bring up a child on their own, or coping with illness...we are seeing something of the love of God. He has not disappeared.

Christ died but God was not gone. There was -there is- hope.

Who's in charge? **'The Lord reigns'** and though there are many dark and difficult things to be faced, the Lord is mightier, mightier than all the forces of chaos and untruth the world can throw at us.