

4th Sunday of Easter [Jubilate]: Ps. 66,1-9 - 17.4.2016

Shout with joy to God!

¹ Shout joyful praises to God, all the earth! ² Sing about the glory of his name! Tell the world how glorious he is. ³ Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! Your enemies cringe before your mighty power. ⁴ Everything on earth will worship you; they will sing your praises, shouting your name in glorious songs."

⁵ Come and see what our God has done, what awesome miracles he does for his people! ...

⁸ Let the whole world bless our God and sing aloud his praises. ⁹ Our lives are in his hands, and he keeps our feet from stumbling [NLT]

Shout joyful praises to God - do you mean right here in church?

Shouting and jumping for joy may be what we do at sporting events - even when watching on TV at home -, or when we are really happy about something. But expressing our joy in this way does not seem to fit into our liturgy.

What is it that prevents us from breaking into spontaneous jubilation - and I don't mean only here in church - towards our God? Apart from our reservations in our church in this regard, it may be that right now you feel that there is not much to shout about in your life. You may be facing great problems and questions, and just don't know where to go.

Is the psalmist not being unrealistic with his call:

Shout with joy to God!

Is it not often the case that we would like to shout at God? To shout to him: God why?! Why do you allow these things to happen to us? Why me/ why us?! What have we done to deserve this.

Shout with joy to God! I have just heard again a part of the story Corrie ten Boom told about life in a concentration camp. [For those who don't know her story - she, together with her father and sister had hidden Jews from the Nazis who had occupied her Dutch homeland. They were betrayed by a someone in their hometown, and taken captive. The father died soon after he being

imprisoned in a concentration camp.]

The two sisters, Corrie and Betsie were transferred to a camp in Poland, Ravensbrück. Corrie tells of the humiliation of having to strip naked for medical examinations once a week - but then she remembered how our Saviour had hung naked on a cross. It is this constant living in God's presence which makes the story of these sisters so remarkable.

They would have had every reason to lose their faith - after all they had done, this was their reward. Yet, they continued to see God's hand in all that happened.

In this camp they were moved into a large barrack like dormitory, which stank of the people who lived in there. The bunk beds were stacked so closely together that it was impossible to sit up in them. And then there were the fleas - everywhere!

As they settled in, Betsie called out that she realised what God was saying to them - she asked Corrie to repeat the verse they had read earlier that day: **Be thankful in all circumstances ...** (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

Betsie prompted Corrie to give thanks - for the fact that they were together, that they had not been searched, and had been able to keep their Bible; for the close proximity of the other inmates, because it made it easier to share the Gospel message with them. To give thanks - even for the fleas! Corrie thought this was too much - God could not expect her to give thanks for fleas.

Yet, as it turned out later, the warders did not enter their sleeping quarters because of the fleas. This made it possible for them to conduct services with their fellow inmates, and as they read the Bible in Dutch, translated it into German, it was translated further into French and other languages. Corrie later referred to these services the Holy Place of God's fleas.

Being thankful in all circumstances - in the Psalm we are encouraged to: **Come and see what our God has done, what awesome miracles he does for his people!** The ten Boom sisters had seen something of what God had done - even in the concentration camp! Their prayers were not only for themselves and those imprisoned, but also for those who were their guards. While they were there, they were

planning already for the time after the war - for what they intended to do, to help people get over the trauma of these terrible camps. While Betsie had the dream of what was to be done, it was left to Corrie to carry this out, as Betsie died before she could be released.

Come and see what our God has done! - if we concentrate only on what people have done, on the wrongs they have done us, we will not find any reason to sing God's praises. These two Dutch women can be an example to us today also to look to God in all circumstances of life - *to see what he has done*, and continues to do.

As we celebrate the church festivals - especially Christmas, but also Easter -, we are to concentrate on what God has done for us. There is so much else which might distract us - but the message is simple and yet so awesome that it takes your breath away: the Creator becomes one with his creation. Look how the sinless Son of God, is sentenced to death, so that sinful men and women may be free of the death-sentence hanging over them - for ever!

Come and see - take a closer look at the reality which is not just on the surface. Don't only look down and focus on at what is happening around you right now. God invites you to look away from yourself - to look away from the promises or even the threats of people - and to look to him to take care of what is happening in your life.

That is something for us in South Africa - and many other places in our world - to do, when we see what is happening around us in the political sphere. We are not just to be dismayed by what we hear and see - but we are to keep a lookout to see how God is at work - to see what he has done, and what he is doing.

Come and see what our God has done! In all circumstances of life we are to see what God does. If it were so easy to praise God on all days of our life, we would not need this psalm to remind us. The call comes on a background where things had gone wrong. It comes on a background where we don't have to have all the answers. We are called on to *shout for joy to God*, because when

we are not able to cope on our own, we have the promise that he is there for you and me!

Our joy is that we have a Lord who lifts us up - who holds us, until we can stand again. Corrie ten Boom was able to put those things she and her sister had dreamt of in the concentration camp into practise. She was a living testimony of what God can do - and does.

So it is not about seeing what we can do, but looking to him and what he does. We do not face imprisonment in a concentration camp right now. But there may be other things which threaten to overwhelm you and to weigh you down. You may that whatever your situation is right now, God is with you. That really is something to shout about - every day of your and my life. And not only here in church.