**Reflections – 16-22 February**

**Growing Deep Roots**

**Bible study on Psalm 1**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

We come as we are,
knowing we are loved.
Some of us joyful, some of us weighed down,
together we are here,
looking to you, Lord,
to speak, to inspire, to comfort and to guide.
Meet us where we are and help us to grow in you.
**Amen.**

 **Read the passage**

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.*

Psalm 1

**1**Blessed is the one
    who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
    or sit in the company of mockers,
**2**but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
    and who meditates on his law day and night.
**3**That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
    which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
    whatever they do prospers.

**4**Not so the wicked!
    They are like chaff
    that the wind blows away.
**5**Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
    nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

**6**For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
    but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

 **Explore and respond to the text**

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once, or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

 **Bible notes**

Psalm 1 is one of the ‘Wisdom’ psalms that consider the meaning of life, and, in particular, the problem of God’s people suffering while the wicked prosper. In the psalms ‘the wicked’ are those opposed to God and therefore to God’s people; ‘sinners’ are those who are out of step with God, and ‘scoffers’ are those who are proud at their own self-sufficiency. In today’s psalm, these people are described as ‘like chaff that the wind drives away’ (v.4). They are easily rocked and thrown off course by circumstances. In contrast ‘the righteous’, those who are in relationship with God, are not self-sufficient. They focus on God’s instruction (the ‘law’), on living God’s way – and God watches over them. This gives them stability and a reason to feel secure and confident in their resilience – a stronger feeling than the translation ‘happy’ would suggest.

There is a picture here of fruitfulness, of the flourishing of healthy plants that have all they need to grow and thrive. This is a common picture in the Hebrew Bible for God’s people. It speaks of permanence, rootedness in God, depth and stability of faith. It takes time, nourishment and consistency to grow into a strong tree. The suggestion that God’s people prosper is one that we could easily argue with when we consider the suffering that is often part of life. However, it is the deep-rootedness of a tree that enables it to stay standing, to live and eventually to flourish once again. It may not come through adverse circumstances unscathed, but it can still stand firm.

**Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

Plants or shrubs that shoot up in the desert often have a short season to grow, fruit and seed. Their roots have little time to develop so, when the hot dry conditions return, they have no root system to sustain them. They dry up and die. The shrubs described in Jeremiah 17 have limited growth potential as the conditions in which they live do not provide what they need to grow and flourish. This is contrasted to the trees growing by the river whose roots are deep with space and good conditions to grow, similar to the trees mentioned in Psalm 1. The well-developed roots sustain and nourish the tree when storms and drought come. Its green leaves and fruit indicate that it is surviving well. In what or who are we ‘rooted’? Are we being nourished and sustained in our growth and development?

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

**First impressions**

You could also use the image and following questions to help introduce the theme.

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**Questions**

* How are your spiritual roots? Deep and healthy? Or shallow?
* If people pulled you up by the roots what would they see?
* What helps to nurture deep roots?

 **A prayer to end the Bible study**

Life-giving God,
keep us well rooted in you,
so we can grow and be strong
through all that happens this week.
As you encourage us,

may we encourage others to live and grow well.
**Amen.**