

St. Barnabas Church 10<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Readings:

Lamentations 3:17-26

Psalm 126

1 Peter 1:3-9

Psalm 126 *"The Lord has done great things for us."*

In my estimation, Bill Shankley was the greatest football manager. He took Liverpool from being an obscure team, languishing in the second tier of English football to the top flight supported by fanatical fans. He was a down to earth guy with no airs or graces and totally passionate about the game, making the following statement at which some Christians recoiled, *"Some people believe football is a matter of life and death. I am very disappointed with that attitude. I can assure you it is much, much more important than that."* He retired in 1974 at the top of his profession but would later admit that he should have continued for a few more years. His health deteriorated and to add to his sadness, he no longer felt welcome at Anfield, the football stadium. This must have caused him to despair. However, six months before his death seven years later, he was visited by an Anglican minister (Alan Godson) who led him to accept Jesus Christ as his Saviour. God did great things for him before he died and filled him with great confidence, joy and hope.

He had enjoyed success in his life but he also experienced bad times which must have reduced him to tears. It sounds similar to what we read this morning in Psalm 126, *"When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, 'The LORD has done great things for them.' The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad. Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negeb! Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him."*

I prayed about my subject matter for this morning's sermon and Psalm 126 was one of the readings in the Lectionary. It is about the Lord's turnings and when He freed His people from captivity it was like a dream too good to be true. Yet it was true and resulted in mouths filled with laughter and tongues filled with praise. It was so apparent that they testified about God doing great things among the heathen nations and for themselves for which they were glad. This gave them confidence to ask God to restore their fortunes saying that those who sow in tears

shall reap with shouts of joy. He who would go out weeping bearing seeds to sow, will return with shouts of joy bringing home a harvest of sheaves. *“The LORD has done great things for us.”*

We should just reflect on the multiple blessings He has bestowed upon us and be thankful. However, dare we believe that *“The LORD will do even greater things for us?”*

The Scriptures make it abundantly clear that what we sow is what we are going to reap (Gal. 6:7). If we sow barley, we are going to reap barley. If we sow thistles, we are going to reap thistles. But we learn in this passage that the way we sow is not necessarily the way we will reap. If we go out to sow with tears we can come back singing songs. We go out carrying our precious small seeds on which everything depends. Though the load is light, the sowing is accompanied with tears but then, at harvest, we will be laughing, singing and carrying the great weight of sheaves.

The Word of God is true but can we appropriate it? God loves to release His people. He loves to hear their laughter as they come, disbelieving, out into the sunlight. He loves to listen to the songs that they sing when this happens and the people say about the nations, *“The LORD has done great things for them..... and for us”*

Dare we believe that *“The LORD will do great things for us?”*

Think of Noah and his family coming out of the ark onto dry land (Gen. 8:18). Think of Joseph being brought out of jail, hurriedly washed, and hustled into Pharaoh’s throne room (Gen. 41:14). Think of Jacob being told, after many years exiled in his grief, that Joseph was alive, and ruling over Egypt (Gen. 45:28). Think of the Israelites in Egypt, labouring in slavery for many years, suddenly released (Ex. 12:37-38). Think of the Jews in Babylon, suddenly hearing about the decree of Cyrus (2 Chron. 36:22). Think of Esther and Mordecai, as they contemplated how God arranged the reversal of fortunes between Haman and Mordecai (Esther 8:1-2). Think of Peter in prison, kicked in the side by an angel, and then escorted out (Acts 12:7). Think of Paul in prison in Philippi, escorted out by the city officials (Acts 16:35-39). One of God’s great gifts to His people is the vision of their prison doors swinging out. Can He do it for us in our situations right now in 2022?

Dare we believe that *“The LORD will do great things for us?”*

In this life we all go through troubled times, deep valley experiences whenever tough times hit. Like myself, some of you are experiencing valley experiences at this present time. We are not exempt, but what are they?

### **1. Valleys are inevitable**

They are going to happen so we might as well count on them. We have either just come out of a valley, we're in one right now, or we're probably headed toward one. Valleys happen throughout life - one after another. After every mountain top there is a valley. Jesus was very realistic about it and in John 16, He says *"In the world you will have trouble."* It's not a matter of if, it's when. It's going to happen and we are going to have difficulty, disappointment, and discouragement in life.

There will be times of suffering, sorrow and sickness. There will be times of frustration, failure and fatigue. They are going to happen. They are a normal part of life and we should not be surprised by it. Yet, irrespective of the inevitable valleys, dare we believe that *"The LORD will do great things for us?"*

### **2. Valleys are unpredictable**

We cannot plan, time or schedule them. Valleys are always unexpected and usually come at the worst time - when we don't have time or when we are unprepared. Have you ever had a puncture at a good time? They just happen, usually when we least need them and cause a lot of inconvenience as a result. It would be good if we could schedule our valley times but we can't plan life like that. Have you noticed how easily a good day can become a bad day? A phone call, a letter, a routine doctor's check-up, a freak accident. Valleys just happen. Jeremiah 4:20 *"Disaster follows disaster... In an instant my tents are destroyed, my shelter falls in a moment."*

Yet irrespective of the unpredictable valleys, dare we believe that *"The LORD will do great things for us?"*

### **3. Valleys are impartial**

No one is immune to them. No one is insulated from pain and sorrow. No one gets to skate through life problem-free. Everyone experiences problems, trials, difficulties, disturbances, downtimes and depression. The Bible is very clear that good things happen to bad people and sometimes bad things happen to good people. Valleys are impartial - they don't care how good or bad we are. Many Christians have suffered from depression and berate themselves because they feel failures in their walk with Christ but remember that Elijah suffered from deep depression immediately following God working miracles through him. So the good person suffers in this life as well as the bad.

Yet, irrespective of the impartial valleys, dare we believe that *"The LORD will do great things for us?"*

#### **4. Valleys are times of regret**

At times they bring heartache especially when the good times come to an end. Vivien and I resigned from our positions at Capernwray Hall eight years ago and returned home to the Isle of Man for the next stage of our life together. We believe that God called us to return to spend more time with our family but also to become involved in the ministry which He has planned for us. However, we loved Capernwray and on leaving we went through the valley of regret – we missed the staff and ministry to the student body. It is when everything is going well and we are most satisfied with life that God guides us to move. Have you noticed that this does not happen when we are most dissatisfied with our life in the place where He has placed us?

Yet irrespective of the valleys of regret, dare we believe that “*The LORD will do great things for us?*”

#### **5. Valleys are temporary**

They have an end to them and are not a permanent location. David says, “*Even though I walk through the valley...*” The valley is not something we stay in our entire life. It’s something we go through - a circumstance, a situation that has a season to it. When we’re in a valley we often think it’s a dead end, but it’s not; it doesn’t stay, it comes to pass. “*Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.*” This Psalm is written to believers who, when they die, will walk through the valley of death, not run, and, most importantly, will not remain in that place. I Peter 1:6 “*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.*” He admits that sometimes we’re going to go through tough times. It’s going to be rough because life is tough. We’re going to be in the valley for a while but there is the wonderful joy of heaven ahead where there are no problems, no valleys, no dark days. While we may be harassed down here on earth, in heaven it will be totally different. If we know the Lord Jesus Christ, that’s where we’re going.

Yet, irrespective of the temporary valleys, dare we believe that “*The LORD will do great things for us?*”

#### **6. Valleys are purposeful**

God has a reason for allowing us to go through the valleys whether its doubt, depression, despair, discouragement, defeat. There are financial valleys, relationship valleys, emotional valleys, and all kinds of different trials. These purposeful valleys do not happen by accident for that is where God wants to build our faith. We love to enjoy the mountain tops, but it is not there where we build faith. It is in the valleys of life where we

grow. When everything is going fine and life is wonderful we don't really need God but when we come face to face with a dark valley, we get on our knees. Faith is strengthened in the valleys which is where our faith is tested. Every problem has a purpose, even the little tiny ones, the inconsequential ones, the things that seem like mere irritations. Therefore, in the purposeful valleys, dare we believe that *"The LORD will do great things for us?"*

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God teaches us character in our valley experiences because He wants to change and mature us but we must continue to live in hope. Jeremiah said in Lamentations 3:18-20, *"My splendour is gone, and all that I had hoped from the Lord."* *I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.* Jeremiah was going through a valley but he records his hope in verses 21-26, *Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.* Therefore, in the purposeful valleys, dare we believe that *"The LORD will do great things for us?"*

Paul talks about that in Romans 5:3-5, *"Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given us."* Hope does not disappoint, *"Because God."* Which is exactly why Jeremiah was able to find hope in his dismal circumstance back in Lamentations 3:21, *"Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope."* What did He call to mind? *"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail."*

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In light of all these Scriptures, we should have confidence and say with conviction, *"The LORD will do great things for us."* There has to be mountain tops in order for valleys to exist. Therefore, as individuals, I would like you to bring to your attention the thing or things that are concerning you, the valley in which you find yourself at present.

Now I am going to pray on your behalf and ask our Heavenly Father to step in and gently draw you out of the valley with the promise that He will do great things for you.

*“He will perfect that which concerns you.” (Psalm. 138:8)*

## **Personal prayer**

This is a personal prayer (singular) for those of you going through a valley experience at this time.

Lord of unfailing love, I have read that there are many afflictions for the righteous, but only now do I understand the meaning of afflictions. My current circumstance is causing profound emotional distress. All the pain and stress are consuming my mind and strength. My emotions are dominating me, and nothing I do is gaining control. I pray that You will deliver me from all my troubles.

Knowing You will deliver me brings comfort to my anguished soul.

As I breathe in the love and power that back up all Your promises, I can pray with confidence that You will deliver me and grant me victory.

I ask You to renew a right spirit within me and be my victory in the battle for my emotional well-being.

Fill me with that quiet assurance that You will do great things for me.

Amen.