

# Praise, thanksgiving and love –

## worship in the countryside

### rural worship

**Whenever I think about the countryside in our times, it is Psalm 107 which often comes to mind.**

This psalm was perhaps sung by pilgrims coming to Jerusalem, as Jesus did, to celebrate a festival, and is a song of thanksgiving for being able to celebrate together. But that thanksgiving is shot through with the memory of where the worshippers have come from and what has happened to them. The psalm is rich with experience, and the thanksgiving is the more poignant, because the pilgrims are safe; the very fact that they are there together in worship, is itself testimony to the greatness and mercy of God. It seems to me that we can learn lessons for our own worship from this.

The psalm opens with a general thanksgiving and a focus on God as both good and faithful. No matter what happens, what trials and difficulties we may face, we can be utterly sure of these facts: the faithfulness and goodness of God can never fail. This tremendous affirmation means that worship starts with God at the centre; he has gathered the

worshippers together. But who are they? Where do they come from? What did it take to get there?

The psalm then remembers the wanderers, the nomads, those alone, cut off, isolated, far from 'an inhabited town' and reminds us that no matter how deep in the countryside we are, how isolated we may be, and how difficult that can be if we are elderly, or sick or without transport, God's 'steadfast love' will never stop searching us out. Even if other people let us down, God is looking for us, longing to satisfy our needs. Even if we think we are utterly lost in the deep heart of the countryside, we have something to celebrate: God is coming for us, to guide us.

The next part of the psalm talks about people in prison, people broken by hard labour, people exhausted and without hope and how God comes to save them, to release them, and 'save them from their distress'. Certainly in recent years, we have been aware of many people on farms and in other rural industries who know about the prison of debt and financial ruin, broken by endless

work for no reward, and exhausted by coping with animal disease. But this psalm reminds us that God's desire is release and salvation from such bondage.

A little later, we are reminded of the seafarers, and the dangers and difficulties of trying to earn a living from the sea: 'Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the mighty waters'. A picture is painted of human vulnerability in the midst of a raging storm. Yet the pilgrims give thanks that God can calm the waters and still the sea and bring them home again. The psalm reflects the life of all today who wrestle with the sea to make a living and the dangers of trying to live with nature.

And why, finally, should we praise and give thanks to God? Because, the psalm tells us, God wants us to 'sow fields, and plant vineyards and get a fruitful yield. Our cattle must not decrease.' He is continually waiting to bless us. He will never give up on us. His love endures. ■

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