

Read Psalms 34: 11 ó 14

I have been drawn to these words from Psalms 34: 11 ó 14 as I have contemplated the large number of our young people who have recently found themselves in new situations, with new vistas before them, new opportunities and, for some, undoubtedly, new challenges. All of these have the potential of crowding God out of their lives or at least diminishing His visibility as the field grows more crowded. Some are going to new schools as they move from primary to secondary and even on to tertiary, and, for many, God does seem to command less attention at each higher level. For young adults, the various pressures competing against God for their attention are no less. And not just those going on to college, as the workforce can be equally distracting, as of course can other aspects of adulthood, like marriage, and, perhaps even more so, what comes before that; or the newness of parenthood; or some unpleasant state of newness such as unemployment or a broken relationship; or the newness promised by the deceivers of this world, whether gang leaders or other predators of the vulnerable.

Let me interject here that I am well aware that there are also *older* people who need to learn the fear of the Lord, as other translations put it, that is to have a reverent understanding of God as the beginning and the end of all, or *why* it is still completely relevant to do so today, *and as necessary as it ever was*. But in our population there is a much higher percentage of young people than older ones. So there are many more of them who need to be encouraged by others to, come, my young friends and learn to honour God. As we think of the situation in our Island today, a line from a Bob Dylan song (quoted by Todd Burkhalter in *One Shot*), raises a sobering question: *How does it feel to be on your own with no direction home, like a complete unknown, like a rolling stone?* There is no valid excuse for any young person in our society not knowing the way home, home to Christ. But it is a tragic reality that many of them have *no direction*. And that in all this good life we have here, they do *feel like a complete unknown*, rather than a VIP child of God. And the consequences are obvious.

And it doesn't have to be a person my age extending that invitation to come and learn that you are not on your own. I keep reminding people that Jesus was a young adult during the entire period of his earthly ministry. Furthermore, He was just a 12 year old when he confounded the teachers in the Jerusalem temple with His knowledge of the Scriptures. So it would be great if a large number of young people, filled with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and a sound knowledge of the Scriptures, were saying to their contemporaries, *Come, my young friends, and listen to me, and I will teach you to honour the Lord.* But that is no reason us older folks should *not* be doing so *as well*; Christ did *not* set an age limit on who was to teach His Gospel, He just said *all of us must do so*.

And because Christ said so, if we claim to be a Christian and therefore possess an experience of God, whatever our age we ought to be echoing King David and saying, *come my young friends and let me share with you the reality of God and the assurance you can have that what He has done for me, what He's done for others, He'll do for you*

It's not an option; it is the basic *commandment* of Jesus. To let these young people of all ages know, *in the right way*, that because Christ cares for their *future*, regardless of their *past*, we are offering to take the time and teach you to honour the Lord. If you will spare some time and listen to me. The Psalmist recognised two essential elements in that verse. They will not have the opportunity to *learn* if they will not take the time to *listen*, to open their ears, minds and hearts to give a fair hearing to the testimony of the witnesses to God and His interaction with humans over the eons. So something is demanded of them. But, equally, something is demanded of us. They will not have the opportunity to *listen* unless someone takes the time to *teach*. Some of us might wish to get out of this latter responsibility by arguing that countless others have already sacrificed the time to help write and translate the Bible into hundreds of languages, and innumerable other books about Christ, and God's precepts, etc. and etc. So anyone who wants to learn about God can teach themselves. Probably some people do, with the help of the Holy Spirit. But that was *not* the model God chose to use. *Go* and *teach*. Christ said, even if it takes a while and one might plant the seed and another have to do the watering until God makes it grow. God has always been big on us living in *community*, helping and caring for one another, not looking after ourselves alone. And let's face it, if we used that reasoning for teaching everything else, we'd just hire a few primary teachers to teach the children to read and then say take the books or your i-pads and teach yourself all the other subjects, all else there is to learn. No teachers, no parents helping with homework or ensuring it is done. It doesn't work that way. But isn't that a big part of the reality as far as learning about God is concerned? Too often, not even parents are pushing the subject. If I want to learn, I have to spare the time and listen with an open mind. If I want others to learn what I have discovered, as Jesus commanded me, then I have to spare the time and teach, whether I am planting the seed or I am watering what someone else started.

The Psalmist also recognises the need to get the attention of the young people. So he raises a subject likely to be dear to them, whether they want a long life and to enjoy happiness. In some translations, it is put as simply *desires life*, which obviously is used to mean more than just *being alive*, and to *see good*. I think, though, that we need to be very careful not to get misled by the words used here by thinking in modern materialistic terms. Without any disrespect, this might be especially important to emphasise to our young friends, to whom terms like *long life*, *enjoy*, *happiness*, *good things*, or *prosperous*, might convey a different message than the Psalmist intended. But the Psalmist was not seeking to deceive anyone. He goes on to say that the *righteous* may have *many troubles* (NIV) but the Lord rescues them from them all (NRSV); *The Lord is close to the broken-hearted* and saves those who are *crushed in spirit* (NIV). So, no attempt to make us believe that we will necessarily escape the earthly sufferings that might even be to such an extent that we feel *crushed* and *broken hearted*; but assurance that even in all of that the Lord will be *close* to us and take us through. What he does seek to reassure his young friends of is that *When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears, and rescues them* from all their troubles. Not so with the evil.

Perhaps we need to jump to the last two verses of the Chapter to get to the core of his message, "Evil brings death to the wicked and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. [But]The Lord *redeems the life* of His servants; none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned (NRSV)." Jesus condensed all these verses in a much shorter promise, and made it much clearer exactly how long a life it would be for those who "take refuge in [the Lord]", when He said that whoever *believes* in God's one and only Son "shall not perish but have *eternal* life." "Eternal" is that is a *long life* indeed. And for those who really want *life* in its full meaning, the real "good" and the true "happiness" the Psalmist mentioned, Jesus also had this to say, "I have come that they may have *life* and have it to the *full*."

It is also Psalm 34 that invokes the familiar appeal, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." That would be my plea to young people too. Give God a chance - and see what happens. Others are telling them that in this modern age we are too smart to believe all this stuff about God, and Jesus, and life after earthly death, heaven and hell. My young friends, just claims like that should be enough to make you wary of listening to them! King David was a *factual, historical* person that lived about *3,000 years* ago. And in *his* time as well as *before then* there were people making the same claims "there is no God, we're too smart to believe all that, we are our own gods. What you might find interesting is to look at the history of any once great nation that became convinced they could do as they pleased, be their own gods. And also look at the number of great minds in all kinds of fields, including science, and see the number of them who have believed in God. I think you will find a pretty impressive list of men and women whose intellectual records and achievements will stack up quite well against the naysayers. So, all I am asking is that you "taste". You listen with an open mind. And you look to and at Christ *himself*. Don't just look at *us* in the Church, to make up your mind whether there is a real, caring God calling out to you. I admit that often *we* do Jesus and Christianity a great disservice. But I am *confident* if you look to *Christ* with an open mind you will *not* be disappointed.

But Christianity is not for whiners who blame someone else for all the troubles. As the Psalmist said today, *you* are going to have to undertake a central role too. It's *not* left to *others*. *You* must "turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and *pursue* it." Or "search for peace, and *work to maintain* it." You will find that "peace" has a much wider meaning than we use it for now, but it is clear that you don't just seek and find it and all is well; you've got to put your heart, and your back, your all, into it. *Pursue* it all the way to Jesus, Who assures us, "so that *in me* you may have peace." So, to echo the Psalmist, "Do you want long life [in fact, *eternal* life] and happiness?" Then accept Jesus' invitation, as He too is saying to you, *Come, my young friends*. Come. Amen

Living God, thank You for the reassurance of Your holy and caring presence with us in all situations. Thank You for the countless ways You take to show Your love to us, as in the fragrances and quiet of the night; the beauty and bustle of the new day; the joy from loving others and being loved. Continue to bless us and protect us we pray. In a special way, dear God, we pray that the young people of our land will not be misled but will give You the opportunity to fill their lives through the saving gift of Jesus. Use our programmes like the Alpha Youth in the John Gray Memorial Church and the Alpha course for young adults in the Savannah and Elmslie United Churches to help them truly learn to honour and follow You, we pray. Amen