



# Archbishop of Sydney

21 July 2021

Dear brothers and sisters

I am aware that the prolonged lockdown will be taking its toll on you, your family and your church/community. It's taking its toll on me! I found great encouragement in the words of my morning reading, Psalm 86. The Psalmist (David) as so often, cries out to God 'all day long' (v2) for he is 'poor and needy'(v1). He prays, somewhat surprisingly, for joy: 'Bring joy to your servant, Lord, for I put my trust in you' (v4).

And to fuel his joy, he calls to mind the greatness of the one to whom he prays:

*You Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call on you. (v5)*

*Among the gods there is no one like you, Lord, no deeds compare with yours. (v8)*

*For you are great and do marvellous deeds; you alone are God. (v10)*

*But you, Lord, are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. (v15)*

In v 11 the psalmist makes his request:

*Teach me your way Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart that I may fear your name.*

God is faithful. He is what he has revealed himself to be – slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He does what is according to his own nature and purpose - the God of marvellous deeds who forgives our sins and 'delivers from the depths' (v13). From this side of the resurrection of Jesus, we might add, he will build his church and bring a new creation, where there is no more sickness, or dying or tears.

God is faithful – he will do all this. So the psalmist prays that he will 'rely' on God's faithfulness and 'fear his name' with a heart that is 'undivided' - neither diverted, distracted nor dismayed.

We are exhorted daily to 'trust the science'; we have come to rely on technology, on government assistance, on others 'doing the right thing'. There is nothing improper in any of this – God be thanked for it all. But our reliance on these, and especially ourselves, may distract us from reliance upon the one who gives us food in due season, who sustains all things by his powerful word, and who gave his Son for our sakes, and his Spirit to dwell within.

The psalmist prays that he would rely on God, with an undivided heart. That is a prayer for me, and my prayer for you. That our hearts would be undividedly assured of the faithfulness of our God, in trying times and uncertain days, so that we may rely on him. In such reliance, we will find the renewal of our joy.

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Thank you for all you are continuing to do to sustain and nurture the congregations in your care. Be assured of my prayers for your ministries, and for your families, especially with spouses and children working and studying from home.

As the lockdown restrictions have tightened in the Canterbury- Bankstown, Liverpool and Fairfield LGAs, please keep our dear brothers and sisters in these areas especially in your prayers. These communities are suffering. Many households are single income, often NESB, and multigenerational households. Often they are 'one car' families as well, making it difficult to access shopping areas, and testing facilities. Many are not permitted to attend work and cannot 'work from home'. Do pray for God's mercy in restraining the spread of the virus in the South West. I've attached a list of SW churches to assist your prayers.

Please do your best to keep to an absolute minimum the number of volunteers attending church buildings for livestream. We have some flexibility around this, but keeping these numbers as low as possible is good citizenship.

When the psalmist has made his request, he confidently declares:

*I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever. For great is your love towards me; you have delivered me from the depths, from the realm of the dead.* (v12-13)

How great and wonderful is our faithful God whose Son – the 'sign of God's goodness' and our constant 'help and comfort' (v17) - delivers us from the depths, and on whom we may rely.

In Christ



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