

Psalm 66

1. *Be joyful in God, all the earth;
sing the glory of his name; sing the glory of his praise.*
2. *Say to God, 'How awesome are your deeds!
Because of your great strength your enemies shall bow before you.*
3. *'All the earth shall worship you, sing to you, sing praise to your name.'*
4. *Come now and behold the works of God,
how wonderful he is in his dealings with humankind.*
5. *He turned the sea in to dry land;
the river they passed through on foot; there we rejoiced in him.*
6. *In his might he rules for ever; his eyes keep watch over the nations;
let no rebel rise up against him.*
7. *Bless our God, O you peoples; make the voice of his praise to be heard,*
8. *Who holds our souls in life and suffers not our feet to slip.*
9. *For you, O God, have proved us; you have tried us as silver is tried.*
10. *You brought us into the snare; you laid heavy burdens upon our backs.*
11. *You let enemies ride over our heads; we went through fire and water;
but you brought us out into a place of liberty.*
12. *I will come into your house with burnt offerings and will pay you my vows,
which my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.*
13. *I will offer you fat burnt sacrifices with the smoke of rams;
I will sacrifice oxen and goats.*
14. *Come and listen, all you who fear God,
and I will tell you what he has done for my soul.*
15. *I called out to him with my mouth and his praise was on my tongue.*

16. *If I had nursed evil in my heart, the Lord would not have heard me.*

17. *But in truth God has heard me; he has heeded the voice of my prayer.*

18. *Blessed be God, who has not rejected my prayer,
nor withheld his loving mercy from me.*

Refrain

O be joyful in God, all the earth,
sing the glory of his name.

Psalms 66 is an individual thanksgiving. In vv. 1-3, the psalmist summons all the earth to praise the glory (authority) of God's name (his nature and presence), as revealed in his acts of salvation in history and his triumph over his enemies. (vv.1&2, 'Be joyful In God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; sing the glory of his praise. Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! Because of your great strength your enemies shall bow before you."')

The, (vv. 4-6) he invites the congregation to recall God's greatest saving deeds, the deliverance from Egypt, especially the drying up of the Red Sea at the Exodus (v.5, 'He turned the sea into dry land; the river they passed through on foot; there we rejoiced in him. '), the dividing of the waters of the River Jordan in the book of Joshua, where the Israelites followed the Ark of the Covenant, and the defeat of the nations, who opposed Israel (v.6. 'In his might he rules for ever; his eyes keep watch over the nations; let no rebel rise up against him.').

In vv. 7-11, the psalmist sees the hardships and defeats of the wilderness period as a test of the Israelites' loyalty to their God (v.9, 'For you, O God, have proved us; you have tried us as silver is tried. '), but in the end God brought them into Canaan (v.11, 'You let enemies ride over our heads; we went through fire and water; but you brought us out into a place of liberty. '). The psalmist sees all this as evidence of God's saving deeds, including his own deliverance (v.14, 'Come and listen, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what he has done for my soul. '). When he was having problems, he vowed to offer burnt offerings in the temple (v.12. 'I will come into your house with burnt offerings and will pay you my vows, which my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble. '), but now he is ready to will pay his vows with costly sacrifices. (v.13. 'I will offer you fat burnt sacrifices with the smoke of rams; I will sacrifice oxen and goats.')

The last part (vv.14-18) is the psalmist's testimony to the congregation, in which he feels that sin has not got control over him. (v.16 'if I had nursed evil in my heart, the Lord would not have heard me.')

Even while he was having problems, he didn't stop praising God. (v.15, 'I called to him with my mouth and his praise was on my tongue.')

Because of this, God heard him and delivered him by an act of steadfast love. (vv.17,18 'But in truth God has heard me; he has heeded the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, who has not rejected my prayer, nor withheld his loving mercy from me.')

Psalm 66 is a call to joy, in which the psalmist, who has undergone suffering, has found deliverance and hope. The Exodus event, which is referred to in v.5, is a symbol of release from slavery and suffering. We can become enslaved by over-reliance on possessions and material goods, by selfish behaviour, which can blind us from the needs of other people, by a refusal to listen to other people's points of view. The way of God invites us to follow a different path, to be open to the needs of others, to learn to listen, to be servants one of another, as Jesus demonstrated. By following this way, we discover a new way of living, we are set free to experience what life is really about. During the corona virus crisis, we have seen people working together for the common good, people making a great effort to help vulnerable people, many of us realising what matters in life. In some ways, we have been set free, and have discovered new ways of doing things. This then leads to hope and joy, as the psalmist saw when he related the event of the Exodus to his own situation.

Prayer

Almighty God,
you have broken the tyranny of sin
and have sent the Spirit of your Son into our hearts
whereby we call you Father:
give us grace to dedicate our freedom to your service
that we and all creation may be brought
to the glorious liberty of the children of God;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

(Collect for Trinity 3)