

Psalm 121 (New International Version)

1 I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?
2 My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.
3 He will not let your foot slip—
he who watches over you will not slumber;
4 indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
5 The Lord watches over you—
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;
6 the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.
7 The Lord will keep you from all harm—
he will watch over your life;
8 the Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore

Watching the news or reading a paper, today might seem like the end of the world. Quite easily we could feel that this case is hopeless, we are doomed. The shops are empty, people are locked in their houses, schools are closed, cafes, bars, restaurants... is this the end of the world as we know it? People are understandably scared, the statistics and numbers that the media presents us with are simply unhelpful, they tell us how many have died, but not how many have recovered. These predictions of the end of the world are entirely unhelpful.

Christians are persecuted all over the world, for owning a Bible, they meet in secret, in fear of death. We are unable to meet at the moment, but that won't last, we will get back together, and even if we did meet, we wouldn't be shot for it. We are able to send out Christian resources, to use the internet, YouTube, Facebook etc etc, all these things are there for us to use – this modern social media, not forgetting the old fashioned card and letter writing and phoning people up. Imagine living in a country where that wouldn't be allowed, where professing your faith in Christ on social media would get you locked up, or worse. That's not the case for us. **How blessed we are?**

As I sit here writing this, in my study in my warm house with a packet of Fudge Bites and a cup of hot chocolate beside me, I'm reminded of the nurses and doctors of our NHS. They are under immense pressure, trying to treat people, to answer questions and to keep everyone safe. I'm reminded of the cashiers in Morrisons and Sainsburys and Tesco, being shouted at for trying to stop people buying 50 rolls of toilet paper and 17 tins of beans. I'm reminded of the carers in care homes, having to turn visitors away if they are not close family, to keep the most vulnerable safe. I'm reminded of the police, the firefighters, the postal workers, the schoolteachers, the charity volunteers, who keep doing what they do, to make the world a better place. These people are here to help at this strange and difficult time. **How blessed are we?**

We'll manage, because we live within the love of God. Whether we recognise it or not, we live within the love of God. Plenty of people outside of the church don't realise that, they don't see any hope, any way of counting their blessings. But we, as followers of Christ, can see our blessings, we can see the hope that Christ and his resurrection have given us. Look out of your window. Can you see bits of blue sky? There may be grey clouds, even black ones, but beyond that, trying to poke through, definite signs of blueness. The sun is more visible, it is warmer, it is around for longer. Can you see any greenery? My garden is a hideous mess, but it's a mess because stuff is growing. I have daffodils, hyacinths, tulips, and in my front garden a tree which I think is going to be a cherry blossom (please God!) when it fully comes out. I can see a cat sitting snuggled up in my long lawn grass, it's quite comfortable, has been there for ages. In the garden

of the house opposite, is a flower planted in the wall, it has been green for months, now it is blooming with tiny white flowers. Beautiful. The world keeps turning, our God has it all in hand. **How blessed are we?**

Don't get me wrong, I'm not limiting the worry we all face, this is a difficult time for us all, separated from those we love, because of distance or self-isolating, or social distancing. This will be the first time in 51 years that I won't be with my Mam on Mother's Day. I won't drive up to see her and my Dad though, because of the advice we're been given about keeping a safe distance and the risk of infection, but we will speak on the phone.

Speaking of infection, there are other infections that are much easier to catch than this COVID 19 thing. Infections like kindness, love and compassion. The internet is full of stories of acts of kindness, the lady who went back home to get some toilet roll for the elderly gentleman she didn't know because he couldn't find any in the supermarket. The street with green cards in their windows so people know they are okay, but they change them to red if they need some help. The people who are phoning, writing, knocking on people's doors. 'How are you doing, can I help?' People are singing from their balconies in Italy, and online choirs have begun, which you can join from the comfort of your own living room, strange, but true. Radio 2 has been having phone-ins, especially over the weekend for Mother's Day. Yes, people can phone their own Mums, but isn't it nice to make it a bit more special, a dedication on the radio? There are lots of new ways to connect with each other, to share our stories, and to keep in touch. We are finding new ways to engage with one another, some new ways – like using YouTube and Facebook, and some not so new, like writing and picking up the phone to say 'Hi'. We moan about people being on social media such a lot, people texting and forever looking at their phones but thank God for mobile phones! **How blessed are we?**

In these strange days, it could be easy to get despondent and think we have reached the apocalypse, but we haven't. This is a difficult time, but we will get through it. We are the children of God, and God never lets us down. He will always look after us, we are resurrection people, disciples of Christ. Whatever you want to call us, we are blessed, we are loved, and we walk in the light of the Lord.

How blessed are we?

Romans 8 v 31-39) New International (Version)

31 What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

36 As it is written:

*“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” [j]*

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, [k] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Grace and Peace
Deacon Helen Snowball