

# 26 September 2021

## Sentence

Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can it be seasoned? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another. Mark 9.50

## Prayer of the Day

O God, your Son has taught us that those who give a cup of water in his name will not lose their reward:

open our eyes to see those who are in need,  
and teach us to set no store by riches and earthly rewards,  
so that, in surrendering ourselves to serve you in your children,  
we may labour for the treasure that endures;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Esther 7.1-6, 7.9-10; 9.20-22

<sup>1</sup> So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet, <sup>2</sup> and as they were drinking wine on the second day, the king again asked, 'Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.'

<sup>3</sup> Then Queen Esther answered, 'If I have found favour with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life – this is my petition. And spare my people – this is my request. <sup>4</sup> For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king.'

<sup>5</sup> King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, 'Who is he? Where is he – the man who has dared to do such a thing?'

<sup>6</sup> Esther said, 'An adversary and enemy! This vile Haman!' Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen. <sup>9</sup> Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, 'A pole reaching to a height of fifty cubits stands by Haman's house. He had it set up for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king.' The king said, 'Impale him on it!' <sup>10</sup> So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided.

<sup>20</sup> Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Xerxes, near and far, <sup>21</sup> that they should celebrate annually the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar <sup>22</sup> as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration. He wrote to them to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

## Psalm 124

<sup>1</sup> If the Lord had not been on our side, now may Israel say:

if the Lord had not been on our side, when our enemies rose against us,

<sup>2</sup> Then they would have swallowed us alive: when their anger was kindled against us.

<sup>3</sup> Then the waters would have overwhelmed us, and the torrent gone over us:  
the raging waters would have gone clean over us.

<sup>4</sup> But praised be the Lord: who has not given us as a prey to their teeth.

<sup>5</sup> We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowler:  
the snare is broken, and we have gone free.

<sup>6</sup> Our help is in the name of the Lord: who has made heaven and earth.

### **James 5.12-20**

<sup>12</sup> Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear – not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple 'Yes' or 'No'. Otherwise, you will be condemned.

<sup>13</sup> Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup> Is anyone among you ill? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup> And the prayer offered in faith will make the ill person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.

<sup>16</sup> Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. <sup>17</sup> Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. <sup>18</sup> Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

<sup>19</sup> My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, <sup>20</sup> remember this: whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

### **Mark 9.38-50**

<sup>38</sup> 'Teacher,' said John, 'we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.'

<sup>39</sup> 'Do not stop him,' Jesus said. 'For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, <sup>40</sup> for whoever is not against us is for us.'

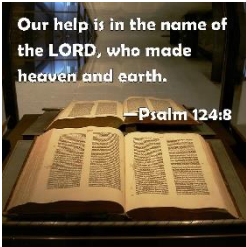
<sup>41</sup> Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.

<sup>42</sup> 'If anyone causes one of these little ones – those who believe in me – to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung round their neck and they were thrown into the sea.

<sup>43</sup> If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. <sup>45</sup> And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell.

<sup>47</sup> And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, <sup>48</sup> where "the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched." <sup>49</sup> Everyone will be salted with fire.

<sup>50</sup> 'Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can it be seasoned? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.'



Our help is in the name of the Lord: who has made heaven and earth.

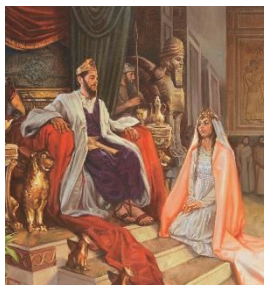
All our readings today points in their own way to this inescapable fact and there is also a continuing emphasis on being humble and serving as God directs, wherever we are.

How well do you know the story of Esther? Basically, Haman was the king's delegate, and very proud of it, he loved to have everyone bow. Mordecai didn't bow, so Hanan took offence but just around the same time Mordecai uncovered a plot against the King and was flavour of the month.

Rather than target the man himself Hanan decided to decimate all the Jews



who were living peacefully in Babylon. He got the king to sign a decree giving everyone in the country the right to kill and loot any Jew in their community and he had a scaffold erected so that he could hang Mordecai himself.



Unbeknown to Haman Queen Esther was Mortdecai's niece so Mortdecai encouraged her to beg the king for clemency. She could not just present herself to the king, so she very bravely prayed and then risked death and asked the King to come for dinner. Our reading today is the climax of the story where she

finally reveals her request to the King, and he responds to save all the Jews.

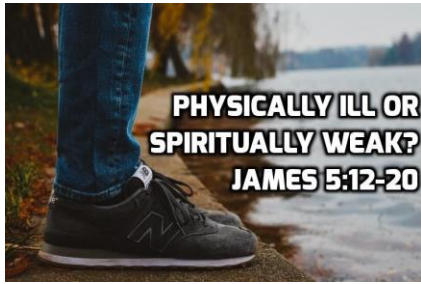
This is what is celebrated by the Jews as the Feast of Purim.



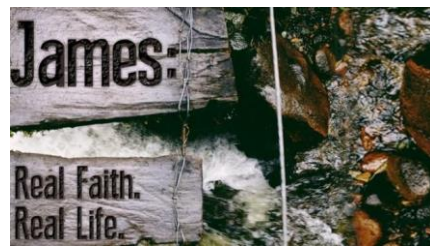
It was Haman's pride which brought the Jews into such danger and Esther's humility which allowed God to save them. Esther could have been proud and hidden behind her position as Queen and missed the decimation of her countrymen, but she trusted God and did what she could. Our help is in the name of the Lord.

Psalm 124 was written at a time of great rejoicing after some national disaster, perhaps even our story today, it records a few of the times when God rescued his people from ruin and is a great reminder for us to read when things are tough and when we begin to see the light at the end of the tunnel. We don't know what will happen with COVID, will we remain safe, or will more cases appear, and we return to lockdown. We just don't know, we cannot even plan for Christmas, but we do know that our help is in the name of the Lord.

The reading from James continues his theme of speaking the truth in love, warning us not to swear oaths and then goes on to give more advice about living the righteous life: <sup>13</sup> Is anyone in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup> Is anyone ill? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup> And the prayer offered in faith will make the ill person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.



Such basic instructions, but how often do we forget. When we're in trouble we worry, when we're happy we tell our friends, when we're sick, we look for medicine. Is this another form of pride? Why is it that we don't turn to the Lord as our first response? Never worry, always trust God, and certainly share when your friends when there is cause for celebration but include the Lord and give Him the praise also certainly go to the Dr, get vaccinated if you can but



pray too and trust God to give wisdom to your Dr. Confess your sins to each other, hold yourselves accountable to those you can trust and encourage and pray for each other. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

God seems to always put a righteous man in my life, someone I can trust who will pray for me and He answers their prayers. I am very grateful for this support. My help is in the name of the Lord.

Our reading from Mark starts with another reference to speaking, someone else was speaking in Jesus' name and casting out demons and the disciples wanted to keep this right to their own little circle, but Jesus is inclusive and says that anyone doing his work today cannot be against Him the next day.



Jesus is trying to teach them that this is a battle between the Kingdom of God and the powers of evil, and this explains some of the quite strong sayings here.

We worship in the Anglican tradition, and we would find it quite difficult to suddenly worship like the Baptists or the Pentecostals because this is what we are used to. But that doesn't mean that the way we worship is right, and the others are wrong, its just different. We are all on the same team and God doesn't mind a little difference in the external things, he is interested in where our hearts are centred. If someone else is doing God's work, speaking in Jesus' name then we know them by their fruit and fight alongside when needed.



Also, in that theme of fighting the battle, anyone who helps in even the smallest way, even just a cup of water is an ally but anyone who trips a disciple up in their faith is in dire trouble and we need to discard anything which is hindering our ability to fight, even if it is not in itself evil.



There was a deep valley called *Gehenna*, near Jerusalem which in those days was used as a rubbish tip, it was constantly burning, smelled foul and was to be avoided whenever possible. It had become a metaphor for the fate of those who reject God's way.

There were many proverbs and stories in Biblical times about cutting off limbs if they were causing offense so Jesus' original hearers would not have been as shocked by these allegories as we are and would have rightly understood them



to be metaphorical. We should, however, notice that Jesus is saying that even good things can hold us back from doing what is right and if that occurs, we need to decide which is more important, life with the good thing or life with Jesus.

A few years ago, I discovered a lovely game on my computer that I was really enjoying, and I was taking every opportunity to spend a few minutes playing it. There was nothing wrong with the game I was just wasting too much time on it. God, put his finger on me, I squirmed a bit, but gave it up for Lent and never went back. Our help is in the name of the Lord: who has made heaven and earth.

Breaking bread, sharing salt together were traditional ways of affirming that we are friends, we don't do it literally nowadays, but Jesus' call on our lives is to be real friends, real allies in the battle, support and encourage each other as we constantly remember:

Our help is in the name of the Lord: who has made heaven and earth.

If God asks us to rely on him and be brave, or just trust Him for the future, or keep Him as the true centre of our lives or even to give up something that we enjoy, we know that He is worthy because Our help is in the name of the Lord: who has made heaven and earth.

