**Reflections – 26 October – 1 November – God Stood By Me**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!
We long to be with you.
Draw us closer to your ever-loving presence.
Draw us deeper as we sing and pray to you.
Let us find our home in you, the God who never leaves us.
Let us rest safely with you, as you walk by our side.
**Amen.**

**Read the passage**

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.*

 **2 Timothy 4:6-8,16-18**

6For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. 7I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

16At my first defence, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. 17But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth. 18The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

**Explore and respond to the text**

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once, or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

**Bible notes**

As he approaches the end of his life, Paul doesn’t see himself as the victim of other people’s desertion or harm (though he mentions them in 4:10-16). He prefers to imagine himself as wine or another precious liquid being poured on the earth as a sacrificial offering. Like Jesus, he has given himself away for others, in particular the Gentiles who have received the gospel through him (v.17). He is like a soldier and an athlete in their perseverance and single-mindedness (v.7; cf 1 Timothy 1:18, 6:12; 2 Timothy 2:3-5). He is proud of what he has achieved, but without losing sight of the One he serves. The ‘reward’ is not Paul’s to deserve, but the Lord’s to give, when God’s kingdom appears in its fullness (v.8): and then not only to Paul, but to all who have served as he has.

The letter includes several references to God’s sustaining strength (e.g. 1:7-8, 1:14, 2:1, 3:11), summed up here in verse 17. This is the source of Paul’s irrepressible courage and confidence, as in Philippians 4:13: ‘I can do all things through him who strengthens me’. This signature statement (he makes a similar one in 1 Corinthians 15:10) ensures that when he tells the story of his apostolic ministry, he points beyond himself, not at himself. He is like his ancestor in faith Daniel, who was also ‘rescued from the lion’s mouth’ by God (Daniel 6:10-24), and the psalmist who prays for the same (Psalm 22:21). If he expects to be martyred soon, Paul can hardly believe that he will always be rescued from the risks of apostolic ministry. His enduring hope, and his experience of the powerful presence of God when he is abandoned by colleagues he might have relied on, show that he is reliably rescued from despair rather than danger. As he puts it elsewhere, ‘(we are) always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. … So we do not lose heart.’ (2 Corinthians 4:10,16).

**Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

Olu needed to get fit. He was overweight. Running for a bus left him breathless. One of his colleagues was a regular at the gym. ‘How often do you go? How much does it cost? How long will it take to get fit?’ Olu asked him. The answers weren’t encouraging. ‘Four times a week, £50 a month, and it’s not just about getting fit, but staying fit,’ replied his friend. Olu said he’d think about it, but he only piled up his excuses.

Paul would have relished this kind of challenge. He compared his vocation to that of a soldier or an athlete (2 Timothy 4:7). I can imagine Olu’s response: ‘That’s OK for an apostle, but an ordinary Christian?’

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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**Questions**

* What do you think this image is about?
* Have there been times when God has stood by you?
* What encouragement could you give to someone who is suffering right now?

 **A prayer to end the Bible study**

Go with God, encouraged by his presence.
Go and look for him in the joys and in the sorrows.
Go and share his love with others.
Go in the knowledge that he stands beside you.
Go in peace.
**Amen.**