

BOOK FIVE

PSALMS 107-150

Psalm 107

12th Sunday Year B
Office of Readings Saturday Week 3

The psalmist uses a number of images to describe the situation people find themselves in through their sin. However, in each case, when they cry out to God their cry is heard. God frees them. The psalmist calls for gratitude and concludes: 'Let those who are wise give heed to these things, and consider the kindness of YHWH'. Jerome's comment is apt: 'This psalm offers a synthesis of the human condition.' It has two refrains. The first is '*They cried to YHWH in their trouble, and he removed from them their distress*' (verses 6 and 28). A slight variation occurs in verses 13 and 19. The second refrain is '*They thank YHWH for his kindness, for the wonderful things he has done for humankind*' (verses 8, 15, 21 and 31).

¹Give thanks to YHWH*, for he is good; for his kindness* endures forever.

Compare the opening verse of psalms 106, 118, 136, and the refrain of Psalm 136. Note the following from the prophet Jeremiah:

The voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of YHWH: 'Give thanks to YHWH of hosts, for YHWH is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!' For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says YHWH.

– Jeremiah 33:11

²So say the redeemed* of YHWH, those he redeemed* from the power of the enemy, ³those he gathered in from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.

The anonymous prophet of the exile, whose oracles are found in the Isaiah scroll writes:

Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; I will say to the north, 'Give them up,' and to the south, 'Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth.'

– Isaiah 43:5-6

Part One. Wandering in a wilderness

⁴They wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to an inhabited town; ⁵hungry and thirsty, their soul* fainted within them. ⁶Then they cried to YHWH in their trouble, and he removed from them their distress.

This theme is frequently expressed in Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55). We think of the Hebrews starving in their wilderness journey. We think also of Jesus in the wilderness and the crowd that he nourished (Mark 6:30-46).

They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

– Hebrews 11:16

They shall feed along the ways, on all the bare heights shall be their pasture; they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them.

– Isaiah 49:9-10

7He led them by a straight way, until they reached an inhabited town

⁸They thank YHWH for his kindness, for the wonderful things he has done for humankind.*

⁹For he satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things.

Part Two. Languishing in darkness because of sin

Say to the prisoners, ‘Come out,’ to those who are in darkness, ‘Show yourselves’.

– Isaiah 49:9

I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

– Isaiah 42:6-7

Shake yourself from the dust, rise up, O captive Jerusalem; loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter Zion!

– Isaiah 52:2

We are reminded of the scene where Jesus brings peace to a deranged man (Mark 5:1-20). We reflect also on the trials that face us, and the effects of sin:

If you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

– 1Corinthians 10:12-13

I will shatter bronze doors and cut through iron bars.

– Isaiah 45:2

¹⁰They sat in darkness and gloom, prisoners in misery and irons,

¹¹for they rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High.

¹²Their hearts were bowed down with hard labour; they collapsed with no one to help them.

¹³Then they cried to YHWH in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress.*

¹⁴He brought them out of darkness and gloom, and broke their bonds asunder.

¹⁵They thank YHWH for his kindness, for the wonderful things he has done for humankind.*

¹⁶For he shatters bronze doors and cuts through iron bars.

Overwhelmed by chaos

Part Three. Sickness that results from sin

¹⁷**They were sick because of their transgressions* ; because of their guilt* they endured affliction.**

¹⁸**They loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death.**

¹⁹*Then they cried to YHWH in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress;*

²⁰**he sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction.**

²¹*They thank YHWH for his kindness* , for the wonderful things he has done for human-kind.*

²²**They offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and recount his deeds with songs of joy.**

We reflect on Jesus healing the sick (Mark 6:53-56; 7:24-37).

It was your word, YHWH, that heals all people.

– Isaiah 16:12

Only speak the word, and my servant will be healed.

– Matthew 8:8

Part Four. In danger of being overwhelmed by chaos

²³**They went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the mighty waters.**

²⁴**They saw the deeds of YHWH, his wondrous works in the deep.**

²⁵**For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea.**

²⁶**They mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in the calamity;**

²⁷**they reeled and staggered like drunkards, and were at their wits' end.**

Ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.

– James 1:6

We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming.

– Ephesians 4:14

Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.

– Mark 4:39

The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

– John 6:18-21

There are references to the congregation of the people in Psalm 22:23; Psalm 35:18 and Psalm 40:11. This is the only time in the psalms that we hear the expression 'assembly of the elders'.

***28**Then they cried to YHWH in their trouble, and he removed from them their distress;*

29YHWH stilled the storm, and the waves of the sea were hushed.

30Then they were glad because they had quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven.

***31**They thank YHWH for his kindness*, for the wonderful things he has done for human-kind.*

32They extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.

Appendix: A Meditation

33He turns rivers into a desert,
springs of water into thirsty ground,
34a fruitful land into a salty waste,
because of the wickedness of its inhabitants.

35He turns a desert into pools of water,
a parched land into springs of water.

36And there he lets the hungry live,
and they establish a town to live in.

37They sow fields, and plant vineyards,
and get a fruitful yield.

38By his blessing* they multiply greatly,
and he does not let their cattle decrease.

Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.

– Jeremiah 23:3

God raises up the needy

**³⁹When they are diminished and brought low
through oppression, trouble, and sorrow,
⁴⁰he pours contempt on princes
and makes them wander in trackless wastes.
⁴¹But he raises up the needy* out of distress,
and makes their families grow like a flock.
⁴²The upright* see it and are glad;
they put a stop to all wickedness.
⁴³Let those who are wise give heed to these things,
and consider the kindness* of YHWH.**

YHWH brings down the mighty and raises up the needy.

Hannah prayed and said, 'My heart exults in YHWH; my strength is exalted in my God. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in my victory. There is no Holy One like YHWH, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for YHWH is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. YHWH kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. YHWH makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap.'

– 1Samuel 2:1-8 (compare the Magnificat, Luke 1:47-53)

Praise YH! Praise, O servants of YHWH; praise the name of YHWH. Blessed be the name of YHWH from this time on and forever more. From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of YHWH is to be praised. YHWH is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like YHWH our God, who is seated on high, who lowers his gaze to the heavens and the earth? He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people. He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise YH!

– Psalm 113

God's power expressed in nature

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of YHWH, the majesty of our God.

– Isaiah 35:1-2

The elements changed places with one another ... land animals were transformed into water creatures, and creatures that swim moved over to the land. Fire even in water retained its normal power, and water forgot its fire-quenching nature. Flames, on the contrary, failed to consume the flesh of perishable creatures that walked among them, nor did they melt the crystalline, quick-melting kind of heavenly food. For in everything, YHWH, you have exalted and glorified your people, and you have not neglected to help them at all times and in all places.

– The final words of the Book of Wisdom 19:18-22

God is preparing a place for those he has chosen. We know from Jesus that God's love goes out to all. Those 'chosen' are those who have welcomed the love offered them.

YHWH God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

– Genesis 2:8

Rain in abundance, O God, you showered abroad;
you restored your heritage when it languished;
your flock found a dwelling in it;
in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy.

– Psalm 68:9-10