

Psalm 138

21st Sunday Year A;
5th Sunday Year C; 17th Sunday Year C
Evening Prayer Tuesday Week 4

The psalmist is praising and thanking God for his kindness, trusting that God will not forsake him and 'will fulfil his purpose for me'. The return from Exile is a likely setting for its composition. The title reads 'Of David.'

**¹I give you thanks, YHWH*,
with all my heart*.**

I give you thanks, YHWH, with all my heart.

– Psalm 9:1

The Greek Septuagint adds: 'You have heard the words of my mouth' (see verse 4).

**In the presence of the gods I
sing of you.**

The psalmist is placing YHWH before other gods in obedience to the Decalogue (Exodus 20:3). Compare Psalm 96:4-5.

**²I bow down toward your
holy temple. and give
thanks to your name for
your kindness* and your
faithfulness. For you have
exalted your name and your
word above everything.**

This seems to be borrowed from Psalm 5:7. Facing towards the temple to pray was a traditional custom (see 1Kings 8:31,33,38,44,48).

Daniel continued to go to his house ... and to get down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God and praise him.

– Daniel 6:10

**³On the day I called, you
answered me, you increased
the strength of my soul*.**

The text for the final part of verse 2 is uncertain. Verse 3 speaks of the encouragement which we receive when God responds to prayer.

**⁴All the kings of the earth
praise you, YHWH,
for they have heard the
words of your mouth.**

What YHWH has done in restoring the exiles to their homeland is known throughout the world. It shows YHWH's love, fidelity and power.

**⁵They sing of the ways of
YHWH: 'How great is the
glory* of YHWH.'**

Note the irony. He who is high looks with love upon those who are low, not those who are high!

For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite.

– Isaiah 57:15

YHWH is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like YHWH our God, who is seated on high, who looks lowers his gaze to the heavens and the earth? He raises the poor from the dust.

– Psalm 113:4-7

When all the prisoners of the land are crushed under foot, when human rights are perverted in the presence of the Most High, when one's case is subverted — does the Lord not see it?

– Lamentations 3:34-36

The Mighty One has done great things for me and holy is his name.

– Luke 1:48

This final verse lifts the psalm above the borrowed and stereotyped earlier phrases, and is one of the finest expressions of hope in God to be found in the Bible.

It is YHWH who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.

– Deuteronomy 31:8

I know the plans I have for you, plans for your welfare and not your harm, to give you a future with hope.

– Jeremiah 29:11

What God has done for us gives us the courage to keep trusting that the purpose of God, the 'Father of mercies' (2Corinthians 1:3) will, finally, be realised in our lives. In the meantime, we are strengthened to trust that 'nothing will separate us from God's love' (Romans 8:35).

I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

– Philippians 1:6

⁶YHWH is high, and he watches over the lowly*; he keeps the haughty at a distance.

⁷Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your left hand, and your right hand comes to my help*.

⁸YHWH will fulfil his purpose for me. Your steadfast love*, YHWH, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.