

Psalm 146 Praise for God's Help

God's Help

This has been quite the week, and one in which I have not been my most stellar self. There is a line in the letter to the Romans Chapter 3 verse 24 that reads, "since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". Well, I feel like I fell short in so many ways. I didn't prioritize well so things were not done in a timely manner. I rebuked others for their behaviour in a not so Christian way, even as what was frustrating me was the unchristian manner of conversations I was overhearing. I was short tempered and not grace-filled and I have since learned, even more unaware of how my physical reactions to what was going on in me and around me were having an effect on others.

To top that off I think I am struggling with what is called compound grief. Between the death of my uncle and another family member, along with the death of a beloved member of our congregation and the overwhelming suffering of another in hospital coping with cancer, well that is making tears well up pretty quickly for me. Love is so deeply important, humanizing, and grace filled, but it also means loss and grief are something one must content with as well.

Then the happenings at the church from renovations, to planning, to organizing, and the fact that we are in the process of hiring an administrative assistant. Well, let just say that most days lately, it is a game of dealing with what rises to the top. Most of the time I am able to forgive myself for the imperfections, other days, not so easy, especially when my example has fallen short or I have hurt others in the process of my own stresses.

It is times like this that the Psalms are a good place for me to land. The Psalms are like the songs of daily life. In the psalms one finds words of praise and joy, dancing and singing, words of life. The psalms are also abundant in words of fear, anger, death, and strife. Words calling out to God in lament and sorrow as well as soaring with hope and promise.

Part of their significance and why these ancient songs and words have continued to uplift and comfort people is that they are available and accessible to individuals, but they also speak to the whole of the human condition. We can say them alone or in community.

This particular Psalm is a praise psalm. It begins and ends with the phrase, "Praise the Lord!" The first two verses are all about praise, "Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long." As well, the title ascribed to this psalm is "Praise for God's Help". So if you didn't get it yet, we are to praise the Lord!

What is interesting is that these verses of praise bookend words that tell of brokenness and hardship. Hear the words in between, think about the situations that may have caused such sentiments to be spoken.

- ³ Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.
⁴ When their breath departs, they return to the earth;
on that very day their plans perish.
- ⁵ Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God,
⁶ who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever;
⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.

- The Lord sets the prisoners free;
⁸ the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous.
⁹ The Lord watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

It can make one wonder about what oppression was being suffered under the hands of rulers and those with power. The talk of mortals in whom there is no help sounds like one who has become isolated and alone, persecuted or having feelings of being abandoned by those who should have cared.

The psalmist also speaks about God's care and compassion for those who are on the margins, whose lives have challenges, a God who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry, sets the prisoners free; opens the eyes of the blind. Think about people you know or have seen that fits those descriptors, maybe it is you. What do these words say to you in terms of God's love and maybe our own iniquity when we see people in those situations?

The psalmist continues saying that God lifts up those who are bowed down; loves the righteous, watches over the strangers; upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. In our time, when there are many opinions about refugees and immigrants, those who are unhoused, addicted, who one may think needs to quit feeding off the system, know that God see each one of them had has a special

concern for their well being, and because of that we too are called to have compassion, taking time to learn what are the root causes of these social challenges locally and globally and doing what we can to lift others up.

For myself I often land with the words “God lifts up those who are bowed down.” It is the weight of things, of responsibilities, of wrong decisions, of harm I have caused, of grief. Those are the things that bow me down and it gives me comfort and peace knowing that God cares even about those things in my life as I am one who does not really have the concerns of oppression or poverty or illness that so many others are contending with.

This psalm reminds us to pay attention to our own attitudes, actions, and words. Are we building people up with our words or tearing them down. As I was well reminded this week just by how my heart felt after speaking and acting in ways that did not fit my hope to be an image bearer of God, all of us fall short of the glory of God. But there is more in that short phrase in Romans that also gives me hope.

I want to share with you how that piece of scripture is paraphrased in *The Message*, a paraphrase of the Bible by Eugene Peterson.

Since we’ve compiled this long and sorry record as sinners and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we’re in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ.” (Romans 3:23-24)

I am also reminded as I read a piece by Professor Rolf Jacobson of the following, “These acts are not universal — not everyone experiences every grace from God. The Psalter knows that we grow sick, we can be killed, we are oppressed. But God moves in the midst of sufferings, sustaining God’s people and pulling the beloved creation forward into God’s preferred future. These acts of deliverance are representative of God’s characteristic intrusions into a broken and suffering world.”¹

So, we hold onto the Psalms as we join our voices with those of the ancients and those who have lived between them and us. All of us human beings living with everything from unimaginable suffering, to just not getting it right. And as has always been the case, those in power still most often do not see the need for compassion and justice. We hold

¹ Jacobson, Rolf. Week 6 (July 5, 2015). [Commentary on Psalm 146:1-10 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#) Accessed September 6, 2024.

onto the Psalms trusting and knowing, maybe learning through it all, God is faithful, present, compassionate and so we say, sing, or shout,

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord, O my soul!

I will praise the Lord as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God all my life long.