

Dear Friend

Having looked at Psalms 111 and 112, both beginning with Alleluia or Praise the Lord, we are now moving on to a series of psalms which all, save one, have this same phrase either at the beginning or the end. If you didn't see the first two reflections, I do commend them to you. However, the first two are linked in their themes and we now move on to another set of psalms also linked but not to the first two. I cannot improve on what Paula Gooder writes in one of the books I am using as my source material, "Reflections on the Psalms" published by Church House Publishing. You may know of Paula Gooder in her current post a Biblical Scholar and Chancellor of St Paul's Cathedral. If you would like to hear more from her, she wrote a reflection for Easter Monday which was sent out via email from St Paul's in their series of daily reflections. Do look at their website for further information.

Paula says: "Psalm 113 begins a small collection known as the "hallel" psalms (Psalms 113-118). Their focus is suggested by the title of the collection. Hallel in Hebrew means simply praise. Indeed the word Hallelujah (which is translated as 'Praise the Lord') occurs regularly throughout these psalms. "The striking feature of Psalm 113 is the encouragement to constant praise of God – from the rising of the sun until its setting. We are accustomed to praising God from time to time, when we remember, but here the psalmist reminds us that the God whom we worship deserves far more praise than that.

"The verb 'to praise' is connected in Hebrew with the verb 'to boast'. This connection reminds us of one of the key elements of praise – that we should boast about God, who he is and what he has done. In the general busy-ness and pressure of life, it is all too easy to forget all that God has done for us. Psalm 113 calls us to a discipline of 'boastful praise of God', to rehearse time and time again, from the rising of the sun to its setting, all that God is and all that he has done. As we do this, we will discover that we become more and more alert to what God continues to do in our world. The more we praise, the more we will discover reason to praise!"

These psalms are also referred to as the Egyptian Hallel and are used in particular at the major Jewish annual festivals. At Passover, Psalms 113 and 114 would be sung before the meal and Psalms 115 and 116 after the meal. It is possible that this practice is alluded to in Matthew's Gospel 26.30 and Mark's Gospel 14.26 in connection with the Last Supper. In other words, these might have been the last psalms which Jesus heard before he was arrested, tried and crucified. This is then the connection of these psalms with the end of Holy Week which we have just travelled through.

As we move onwards with our journey it is good to remember that we need to continue to praise the Lord. It's not time to put our feet up, physically or mentally or spiritually, as we still have work to do – to continue to praise the Lord. The Psalm is a powerful reminder of God's concern for the poor and needy and God's power to effect transformation in human lives. We are all transformed at this time during the lockdown and it gives us a chance to reflect on God's transformation in our lives in a way that we don't usually have the time for.

Today's important verse has got to be:

From the rising of the sun to its setting
The name of the Lord is to be praised.
Psalm 113.3

Let us pray

From the rising of the sun to its setting
we praise your name, O Lord;
may your promise to raise the poor from the dust
and turn the fortunes of the needy upside down
be fulfilled in our time also,
as it was in your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.