

5TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler

READ: PSALM 145:8-14

"The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."

REFLECT:

Today's reading is a beautiful meditation on the character of God, as revealed through experience. In fact it's so beautiful that first off I suggest reading it again, slowly and carefully, and then again.

Consider: does this Psalm reflect your own understanding of God? In what ways have you experienced these words to be true? Notice any words or lines that stand out to you in particular. For me, today, verse 14: "the LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down" struck me anew. What wonderful words of promise.

The words of this Psalm will be familiar to many of us, they are used often in Christian liturgy. Verses 8 and 9 in particular are often spoken in our worship after a prayer of confession as an “assurance of grace.” This Psalm is given special prominence in Judaism too; for over a thousand years some Jews have recited this Psalm three times a day as part of their daily prayers, twice in the morning and once in the afternoon. It has been described by Jewish leaders and commentators as the “prayer of all prayers” and the “entry way to the Psalms.” In its Hebrew form the Psalm is an acrostic; each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Throughout history organised religion has, at times, “pedalled” other images of God... God as punitive, petty, wrathful, or siding with the powerful. The legacy of this bad theology lingers, and still has the power to distort our faith. This Psalm is like a touch stone, reminding and recentering us. It can give us language with which to praise God even in the midst of grief, when we ourselves are “bowed down” or “falling.” It’s a prayer of praise but it’s also a statement of faith. I think that reciting it often, and reciting it together, as community, make a lot of sense.

CONNECT:

Here are some ideas for engaging creatively with this Psalm, and I challenge you to try at least one during the week ahead...

- Try reciting these verses every morning when you wake up, or every evening before you go to sleep, or both!
- Write these verses out and put them up at home in a place where you will see them often – like on your fridge, or your bathroom mirror.
- Try writing your own acrostic Psalm, describing and praising God. You could use the letters of the alphabet (an A-Z of praise!), or a particular word. This might be a private and personal devotion, which is totally fine, but if you’re willing to share I’d love to see them! I’m going to try writing one of my own.

PRAY:

- For all who are bowed down, for all who are falling
- For all those who are living with dementia
- For the residents of care-homes who have been separated from their loved ones now for 100+ days, and for their families who are longing to visit them
- For our elders as they consider and discuss the reopening of our buildings.

RESOURCES AND CONTACTS:

Our friends at Wheatley URC have a huge archive of online sermons you can listen to, and are regularly posting new resources on their website:
www.wheatleyurc.org.uk

If you need any help, have a prayer request, or would like someone to talk to; please contact your elder or one of us:
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