

Lectionary Readings for 8th Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 29:15-28; Psalm 105:1-11; Romans 8:26-39; St Matthew 13:31-33; 44-52.

When I was in my parish in Carnoustie Panbride, my Session Clerk brought me a gift of a magnet which I placed on the gas fire canopy in my study. On the magnet were the words of this prayer -

“Dear God, so far today I’ve done all right. I haven’t gossiped, I haven’t lost my temper, I haven’t been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish or over-indulgent. I’m very thankful for that. But in a few minutes, God, I’m going to get out of bed, and from then on, I’m probably going to need a lot of help. Amen”

I sometimes wonder if giving thanks, being thankful, and expressing these thanks in our prayers is something which does not appear at the top of our prayer topics. It’s easier to ask for this and that – and that is fine as far as it goes. But our prayers lack something if we do not make room for thanksgiving for all the things we receive from God.

The Psalms contain some of the most heartfelt petitions in the Bible, but they also contain some of the best prayers of praise and thanksgiving. Psalm 105, part of the lectionary readings is one such psalm.

This psalm of David is thought to have been written on the occasion of the carrying up of the Ark of the Covenant from the house of Obed-edom. Its importance is seen in the fact that we find the first 15 verses used as a hymn of praise in 1 Chronicles chapter 16 verses 7-22 when the Ark was brought back. Identical words.

The Ark of the Covenant was a symbol of the presence of God in the nation of Israel. So, on its return, it was a fitting thing that David and the people of Israel proclaim aloud the greatness of Jehovah. And thanksgiving and praise is an important part of the psalm. I read in one commentary that there are 91 things mentioned in the 45 verses of the psalm for which we should give thanks.

In the first 5 verses, we discover a variety of things we should be doing by way of praising and giving thanks.

First of all, in verse 1 -

Give thanks to the Lord

Call upon His name.

Make known His deeds among the peoples.

In verse 2 we read

Sing to Him.

Sing praises to Him;

Speak of all His wonders.

On to verse 3,

Glory in His holy name;

Let the heart of those who seek the Lord be glad.

Verse 4, Seek the Lord and His strength;

Seek His face continually.

And finally, in verse 5, we come to the crux of the Psalm.

Remember His wonders which He has done, His marvels and the judgments uttered by His mouth,

The remainder of the psalm traces God's work in choosing Israel as His people, protecting them when they were vulnerable and weak, delivering them through the miraculous events of the Exodus, preserving them in the wilderness, and bringing them into the Promised Land. And we have a compact history lesson. A history of five hundred years of Israel's history in just a few verses, beginning with Abraham (verse 9); continuing through Isaac and Jacob (verses 9-10); continuing further through Joseph (verse 17); and ending with Israel's entrance into the promised land (verse 44).

The clear emphasis of these verses is that God did it all. But it is not left like that. There is also another important element – and the first 5 verses and the last verse, emphasize human responsibility – our responsibility. There are commands - “give thanks,” “make known,” “sing praises,” “speak,” “glory,” “seek”, and “remember.”

The final verse tells us that the reason for God's deliverance and preservation of His people was “so that they might keep His statutes and observe His laws.” We see both God's sovereignty and our responsibility.

And so, this is a Psalm of remembrance. It is a Psalm that looks back in history to the wonderful things that God has done for Israel. But, it's not merely an intellectual look at history. It's a history that gives glory to God. It's a history that ought to stir our hearts to sing the praises of God. We put fuel into cars to make them go. When we reflect on God's faithfulness in history, it should propel us forward and inspire our prayers.

Yes, this Psalm looks back to Israel's history. But it's not as if God merely acted back then in Israel's history. He has been working all down through history. He is working today. And the more that we would see it, the more we would worship the Lord our God with the passion of this Psalm.

Give thanks, with a grateful heart. Search the psalms and use them as a template for your prayers.