

Psalm 25

26th Sunday A; 3rd Sunday B; 1stLent B; 1st Advent C
Office during the Day Thursday Week 1

This is an acrostic psalm (compare Psalm 9-10). The psalmist is feeling 'lonely and afflicted'. He looks to God and is earnest in wanting to learn God's will and keen to do it. Aware of his sinfulness, he humbly seeks pardon, confident in God's merciful love. He is willing to wait patiently for God's response. The psalm highlights the covenant (25:10,14) which is founded on God's hesed, and to which we should respond with reverence (25:12,14), trust (25:2) and hope (25:3,5b,21). Compare the creedal formula 'YHWH, YHWH, a God tenderly compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in kindness and faithfulness'(Exodus 34:6). YHWH is our Teacher (25:8-9,14b). The title reads simply 'Of David'.

Part One. Reaching out to YHWH

'All my longing' translates the Hebrew *nepeš*. See the article 'Being' in the Introduction. As is the case throughout this commentary an asterisks (*) refers to an article in the Introduction.

Seeing 'goodness', 'tender compassion', and 'kindness' together, followed by 'faithfulness' (verse 10) and 'graciousness' (verse 16), recalls the creedal formula:

YHWH said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'YHWH'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will tenderly compassionate towards whom I will show tender compassion.

– Exodus 33:19

YHWH passed before him, and proclaimed, 'YHWH, YHWH, a God tenderly compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in kindness and faithfulness'.

– Exodus 34:6

¹[א] All my longing* is for you, YHWH*.

²[ב] O my God, in you I trust* that I will not be put to shame; that my enemies will not exult over me.

³[ג] All those who hope* in you are not put to shame; those who are shamed are those who are wantonly disloyal.

⁴[ד] Make me know your ways, YHWH; teach me your paths.

⁵[ה] Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are God my Saviour.*

[ו] I hope* in you all day long ^{7b}because of your goodness, YHWH.

⁶[ז] Be mindful of your tender compassion*, YHWH, and of your kindness*, for they have been from of old.

⁷[ח] Do not remember the sins* of my youth or my transgressions*; according to your kindness* remember me.

YHWH is good

Part Two. YHWH is good

⁸[ט] Good and upright* is YHWH*; therefore he instructs sinners* in the way.

⁹[י] He leads the poor* to right judgments*, and teaches the poor* his way.

¹⁰[כ] All the paths of YHWH are kindness* and faithfulness, for those who keep the covenant* and his decrees.

¹¹[ל] For your name's sake, YHWH, pardon my guilt*, for it is great.

¹²[מ] Who are they that fear* YHWH? He will teach them the way that they should choose.

¹³[נ] They will abide in prosperity, and their children shall possess the land.

¹⁴[ס] YHWH gives counsel to those who fear* him, and he instructs them through his covenant*.

As noted in the article 'Kindness' in the Introduction, the expression 'kindness and faithfulness' translates the Hebrew *hesed* we 'emet [חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת] where the accent is on the everlasting fidelity of God's kindness. See the Introduction also for an article 'Covenant'.

The psalmist appeals to YHWH for forgiveness. When he says 'for your name's sake' he is admitting that he himself is not worthy of forgiveness, but if nevertheless YHWH does pardon him, people will come to know how wonderful YHWH is and will call upon YHWH and give YHWH glory. Compare the following:

It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.

– Ezekiel 36:22

I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.

– Isaiah 43:25

Although our iniquities testify against us, act, YHWH, for your name's sake; our apostasies indeed are many, and we have sinned against you.

– Jeremiah 14:7

See the article 'Fear of YHWH' in the Introduction. He is speaking of that fear which is a gift from YHWH – the fear of what we are capable of doing that could cut us off from God

Part Three. The psalmist prays that God will turn to him

The psalmist is content to list the various attributes of God found in the tradition, as well as the traditional terms ‘poor’, ‘heart’, ‘sin’ ‘hope’. Hence the many asterisks referring to articles in the Introduction.

The word translated ‘forgive’ in verse 18 (Hebrew *nāšā*’, נָשָׂא) means ‘lift up’, ‘remove’, ‘take away’.

‘Life’ translates the Hebrew *nepēš*. See the article ‘Being’ in the Introduction. He is referring to his life, his vital energies, his longing, his ‘soul’.

Verse twenty-two stands outside the alphabetical system. It is added to round off the liturgy.

Paul picks up an important theme of this psalm when he writes:

Hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

– Romans 5:5

15[ע] My eyes are fixed on YHWH, yes, he will disentangle my feet from the net.

16[פ] Turn to me and be gracious* to me, for I am lonely and poor*.

17[צ] Relieve the troubles of my heart*, and bring me out of my distress.

18[ק] Observe my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins*.

19[ר] See how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me.

20[ש] O guard my life*, and deliver me; do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.

21[ת] May integrity and uprightness* preserve me, for I hope* in you.

22Rescue Israel, O God, from all its dangers.