

Psalm 30

Easter Vigil
13th Sunday Year B
3rd Easter Year C; 10th Sunday Year C
Evening Prayer Thursday Week I

The psalmist invites the assembly to join in a public act of thanksgiving to God who has rescued him from a mortal illness. In keeping with the understanding of his times, he sees his sickness as God's punishment for his sins. However, God has heard his cry and had pity on him. Compare Psalm 6, Psalm 88, and Psalm 107:17-22; also Isaiah 36:9-20. The title reads: 'A Psalm*. A Song at the dedication of the temple. Of David'.

YHWH has snatched him up, as though out of a grave. A number of times the psalm draws the contrast between descending and ascending. The main foe of which he speaks is death itself.

Death has come up into our windows, it has entered our palaces, to cut off the children from the streets and the young men from the squares.

– Jeremiah 9:21

The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

– 1Corinthians 15:26

Happy are those who care for the poor;
YHWH will rescue them in the day of trouble.
YHWH will protect them and preserve their life,
and they will be happy in the land. He will not
give them up to the will of their enemies.
YHWH will sustain them on their sickbed.
He will restore them from sickness to health.

– Psalm 41:1-3

YHWH forgives all your guilt, and heals all your diseases. He redeems your life from the Pit, he crowns you with kindness and tender compassion. He fills you with good things as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

– Psalm 103:3-5

'Me' translates the Hebrew *nepeš*. See the article 'Being' in the Introduction. The 'Pit' is the physical grave. Sheol is the Pit, not as a physical space, but as the place where the dead lie. There are some parallels with the Greek Hades. See the article 'Resurrection' in the Introduction for the development in the Old Testament of ideas regarding the after-life.

¹I will praise you, YHWH*, for you have snatched me up, and have not let my foes rejoice over me.

²YHWH my God, I cried to you for help*, and you healed me.

³YHWH, you have brought me* up from Sheol, you restored me to life when I was going down into the Pit.

Thanks for health restored

**⁴Sing praises to YHWH,
O you his faithful* ones,
give thanks to his holy
name.**

**⁵His anger* lasts but for
a moment; his favour
throughout life.**

**Weeping may linger for
the night, but joy comes
with the morning.**

**⁶As for me, I said in my
prosperity, 'Nothing will
ever disturb me'.**

'Faithful' translates the Hebrew *hāsîd* [חֲסִיד] and refers to those who are faithful to the covenant made with YHWH who has promised them his kindness (steadfast, covenant love), *hesed* [חֶסֶד]. See the article 'Kindness' in the Introduction.

The thanks is going to YHWH. The expression 'the name' is still used by Jews to respect the transcendence of YHWH.

For a study of 'anger' in relation to YHWH, see the article in the Introduction. If we choose not to welcome God's love we will find ourselves in a state of separation from the source of life. However, the psalmist assures us of God's unconditional and eternal love. Compare the following:

For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says YHWH, your Redeemer.

– Isaiah 54:7-8

Commenting on this verse, Robert Bellarmine writes:

Rightly the psalmist assigns the night to weeping and the day to rejoicing. Firstly, this is because when we sin we distance ourselves from the light of divine grace, which returns only when we are reconciled. Secondly, because this life, in which we weep because of our sins, and sighing, long for our homeland, is a night in which we do not see God, the Sun of justice. The future life will be that day in which we will see God as he is.

Compare the following:

The wicked boast of their ambition, and the greedy are full of self-adulation. The wicked despise YHWH: 'There is no god to whom I must give an account!' What machinations! Their lives are forever twisted. They have removed your judgments from their consciousness and defied all who disagree with them. They think in their heart: 'I will never be shaken, nothing will get in my way!'.

– Psalm 10:3-6

I keep YHWH always before me;
with him at my right hand, I shall not waver.

– Psalm 16:8

The security of which he speaks is found in the temple on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.

He will hide me in his shelter in the hour of danger;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.

– Psalm 27:5

However, the experience of closeness passes, because of sickness, and no doubt for other reasons as well.

He is bargaining with God for a new lease of life. Human beings are called ‘dust’ because of what happens to our bodies in death. The sentiments expressed in these verses was to change, beginning in the second century BC with reflection on the death of the martyrs at the time of the Syrian persecution and the Maccabean revolt. See the article ‘Resurrection and After-life’ in the Introduction.

Note the insistent, threefold plea: ‘hear me’ [Hebrew šāma‘]; ‘be gracious to me! [ḥānan]; ‘help me’ [‘āzar].

The change has been brought about by YHWH:

I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

– Isaiah 65:17-21

Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

– Jeremiah 31:13

⁷By your favour, YHWH, you had established me on a secure mountain; then you hid your face and I was confused.

⁸To you, YHWH, I cried, and to my Lord I made my plea:

⁹What profit is there in my death, in my going down to the Pit?

**Will the dust praise you?
Will it tell of your faithfulness?**

**¹⁰Hear me, YHWH.
Be gracious* to me!
YHWH, help me!**

¹¹You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.

Mourning has turned to dancing

The psalmist is contrasting the silence of death with the singing and dancing of life.

Sheol cannot thank you, death cannot praise you; those who go down to the Pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. The living, the living, they thank you, as I do this day; fathers make known to children your faithfulness.

– Isaiah 38:18-19

From the dead, as from one who does not exist, thanksgiving has ceased; those who are alive and well sing YHWH's praises.

– Sirach 17:27-28

**¹²so that I, your glory*,
may praise you and not
be silent. YHWH my
God, I will never cease
from thanking you.**

The psalmist, through God's gracious gift of life, continues to radiate God's glory. He seems to sense what Irenaeus will say centuries later: 'The glory of God is a person who is fully alive'.

Psalm 30 can be sung in its fullness by the risen Christ, and by those who live his risen life

Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy. When a woman is in labour, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

– John 16:20-22

We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.

– Romans 6:9

As all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.

– 1Corinthians 15:22

The sting of death is sin ... But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

– 1Corinthians 15:56-57

You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors ... with the precious blood of Christ.

– 1Peter 1:19

The sequence sung in the Easter liturgy includes the following verse:

'Death with life contended: combat strangely ended!
Life's own Champion slain, yet lives to reign.'