

Psalm 33

Easter Vigil; 5th Easter Year A
2nd Lent Year A; Holy Trinity Year B
29 Year B; 19 Year C; 30 Year C
Morning Prayer Tuesday Week 1
Office of Readings for Several Martyrs

The psalmist is full of praise for YHWH, the creator and the lord of history, who has chosen Israel as his own. He is inviting the congregation to worship YHWH in music and song. The psalm has no title.

The psalm begins with an invitation to those assembled at the liturgy: the ‘just’ who assemble in response to God’s will. God’s word is ‘upright’. There is nothing devious in God, and we can rely on God’s ‘faithfulness’ in carrying out what he has promised. The following texts speak of God’s faithfulness in all that he does:

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

– Isaiah 55:10-11

All things came into being through him, and without
him not one thing came into being.

– John 1:3

In him all things in heaven and on earth were created,
things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions
or rulers or powers—all things have been created
through him and for him.

– Colossians 1:16

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge
of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how
inscrutable his ways!

– Romans 11:33

Compare the following:

Holy, holy, holy is YHWH of hosts; the whole earth is
full of his glory.

– Isaiah 6:3

You love all things that exist and detest none of the
things that you have made, for you would not have
made anything if you had not loved it.

– Wisdom 11:24

**¹Ring out your joy to
YHWH*, O you just*. Let
the upright* offer praise.**

**²Give thanks to YHWH
with the lyre; make
melody to him with the
ten stringed harp.**

**³Sing to him a new song;
play skilfully on the
strings. Raise your voice.**

**⁴For the word of YHWH
is upright*, and all he
does is done in faithful-
ness.**

**⁵He loves justice* and
right judgments*;
the earth is full of the
kindness* of YHWH.**

The designs of God's heart

⁶By the word of YHWH the heavens were made, and all their host* by the breath of his mouth.

⁷He bottled up the waters of the sea; he put the oceans in cisterns.

⁸Let all the earth fear* YHWH; let the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.

⁹For he spoke, and it was; he commanded, and it came to be.

¹⁰YHWH brings the designs of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples.

¹¹It is the counsel of YHWH that stands forever, the plans of his heart* from generation to generation.

¹²Happy* is the nation whose God is YHWH, the people whom he has chosen as his own.

¹³YHWH watches from heaven; he sees the whole human race.

¹⁴From where he sits enthroned he sees all the inhabitants of the earth –

¹⁵he who fashions the hearts* of them all, and knows all their deeds.

The psalmist reflects on the power of YHWH the creator. If God can command the sea to respect the land and not to encroach beyond the boundaries that he set, and can lock up the subterranean ocean, preventing the collapse of the pillars that support the earth, and allowing it only to well up to the surface in rivers and wells, then let everyone stand in awe at YHWH's power. As in the opening chapter of Genesis, God's will, God's word, is enough to create divine order. How foolish are those who think that they can oppose YHWH with their paltry plans.

The designs of those who act without reference to God's will are frustrated:

Take counsel together, but it shall be brought to naught; speak a word, but it will not stand, for God is with us.

– Isaiah 8:10

Truly 'the plans of God's heart will stand from generation to generation', but we must not forget that:

My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says YHWH. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

– Isaiah 55:8-9

The design of God's heart is to have a people specially chosen as his own, and those assembled for worship in the temple have the special privilege of being that people.

God created the universe simply by a word (see Genesis). The heart of human beings, however, he fashions day by day as he gazes with love upon his creation.

We cannot save ourselves. Even our most powerful designs (and this includes the waging of war) are ineffectual. Contrast the following which Jesus enacts on his entry into Jerusalem:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

– Zechariah 9:9

In Hebrew poetry we frequently find an idea repeated immediately using different words to bring out different nuances. Those who ‘fear YHWH’ (see the article in the Introduction) are defined as those who ‘hope in his kindness’. We think of Jesus in his agony trusting that his Father will ‘deliver him from death’. ‘Them’ in verse nineteen translates the Hebrew *nepeš*. See the article ‘Being’ in the Introduction. The psalmist is thinking of much more than physical life.

The expression ‘with all our being we’ at the beginning of verse twenty translates the Hebrew *nepeš* (compare ‘them’ in the previous verse). To trust in God’s name is to trust that when we call out the name YHWH, God will come to our aid.

Throughout this commentary an asterisk (*) next to a word indicates that there is an article in the Introduction to offer the reader a longer reflection on its meaning and usage in the Psalms.

The final verse forms part of the ‘Te Deum’, a fifth century Latin hymn of praise used in the liturgy.

¹⁶A king is not helped* by his great army; a warrior does not survive because of his great strength.

¹⁷The war horse is a vain hope for deliverance*; it cannot save you by its great show of strength.

¹⁸Truly the eye of YHWH is on those who fear* him, on those who hope* in his kindness*,

¹⁹to deliver them* from death, and to keep them alive in famine.

²⁰With all our being we* wait for YHWH; he is our strength and shield.

²¹Our heart* is glad in him, because we trust* in his holy name.

²²Let your kindness* be upon us, YHWH, even as we place our hope* in you.