

Psalm 81

9th Sunday Year B
Morning Prayer Thursday Week 2

The psalmist, from the northern kingdom (Joseph), calls on the assembly to celebrate the festival in obedience to God's decree. Suddenly (verse 5c), he utters an oracle from God, calling on the people to heed God's word. To celebrate according to tradition is good, but we must always be open to the surprise of God's voice! Note the covenant background: 'your God'(verse 10); 'my people'(verses 8, 11 and 13). The title reads: 'To the leader: according to The Gittith. Of Asaph*'. See Psalm 4 for 'The Gittith' (also Psalm 84).

The psalmist is calling for celebration

**¹Sing aloud to God our strength;
shout for joy to the God of Jacob.
²Sound the instruments: the rhythmic tambourine, the sweet sounding lyre and the harp.
³Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our day of festival.**

For the different nuances of 'statute'[ḥoq הֹק], 'judgment'[mišpāt מִשְׁפָּט] and 'decree' ['ēdūt עֲדוּת] see the Introduction to Psalm 119.

**⁴For it is a statute for Israel, a judgment of the God of Jacob.
⁵He made it a decree in Joseph, when he went out against the land of Egypt.**

The psalmist is interrupted by an oracle from God (compare Numbers 24:3; Isaiah 22:14). The heavy loads were carried in large baskets. God heard their cry of distress.

**^{5c}I hear a voice I had not known:
⁶I relieved your shoulder of the burden; your hands were freed from the basket.
⁷In distress you called, and I rescued you.**

I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them.

– Exodus 3:7-8

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled.

– Exodus 19:16

I answered you, hidden within the thunder. I tested you at the waters of Meribah.

See Exodus 17:7 for the 'waters of Meribah'.

⁸Hear, O my people, while I admonish you; O Israel, if only you would listen to me!

If only you would listen

⁹There shall be no strange god among you; you shall not bow down to a foreign god.

¹⁰I am YHWH your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth. I will fill it.

¹¹But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me.

¹²So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts*, to follow their own whims.

¹³O that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways!

¹⁴Then I would quickly subdue their enemies, and turn my hand against their foes.

¹⁵Those who hate YHWH would cringe before him, and their doom would last forever.

¹⁶I would feed you with the finest wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.'

I am YHWH your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.

– Deuteronomy 5:6-7 (see Exodus 20:3)

Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to YHWH, the God of Israel.

– Joshua 24:23

They shall no longer stubbornly follow their own evil will.

– Jeremiah 3:17

They did not obey or incline their ear, but, in the stubbornness of their evil will, they walked in their own counsels.

– Jeremiah 7:24

You have behaved worse than your ancestors, for here you are, every one of you, following your stubborn evil will, refusing to listen to me.

– Jeremiah 16:12

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts: to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves ... For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. ... And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done.

– Romans 1:24-28

O that you had paid attention to my commandments!

– Isaiah 48:18