

Psalm 85

19th Sunday Year A;
2nd Advent Year B; 15th Sunday Year B
Morning Prayer Tuesday Week 3
Prayer during the Day Office for the Dead

The psalmist recalls God's grace poured out on his people in the past, and prays for that grace now. It is a call to hope in a situation in which there is no respite as one difficulty leads to another (perhaps the period after the return from exile in Babylon?). There are similarities with Psalm 44. The title reads: 'To the leader. Of the Korahites*. A Psalm*.'

¹YHWH*, you were favourable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

The psalm begins by recalling God's care for his people in the past.

The land most precious of all to you.

– Wisdom 12:7

I will restore their fortunes, the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters and the fortunes of Samaria and her daughters, and I will restore your own fortunes along with theirs.

– Ezekiel 16:53

²You removed the guilt* of your people; you covered all their sin*.

Sin blocks our receiving God's grace, but it does not stop God offering grace, for God is always ready to 'remove'[Hebrew *nāšā'*], and 'cover'[Hebrew *kāsâ*] our sins. Sin does not stop us from being God's people.

³You withdrew all your wrath*; you turned away from the heat of your anger*.

Happy the person who is absolved from transgression, whose sin is buried and forgotten.

Happy the person to whom YHWH imputes no guilt, whose spirit is not darkened.

While I kept silence, even my bones wasted away, and I moaned all day long.

For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength dried up as in the summer heat.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you.

I did not hide my guilt. I said,

'I will confess my transgressions to YHWH, and you forgave my guilt and my sin.'

– Psalm 32:1-5

We cannot be sure when the psalm was composed, but as it was prayed after the return from exile the community would have been experiencing the difficulties consequent upon their return.

Restore us, O God; let your face shine forth,
and we will be saved.

– Refrain of Psalm 80:3,7,19

They see their present difficulties as a sign of God's disapproval.

O God, why do you leave us abandoned?

– Psalm 74:1

Perhaps his kindness is exhausted, and his promises have come to an end? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger locked up his compassion? And I say, 'Poor me! The right hand of the Most High has altered.'

– Psalm 77:8-10

How long, YHWH? Will you be angry forever?

– Psalm 79:5

Why have you forgotten us completely?
Why have you forsaken us these many days?
Restore us to yourself, YHWH,
that we may be restored;
renew our days as of old —
unless you have utterly rejected us,
and are angry with us beyond measure.

– Lamentations 5:20-22

They pray for God to repeat in their present circumstances the favours God has shown them in the past.

You have made me pass through many troubles and calamities. You will once again cause me to recover; you will bring me back once more from the depths of the earth.

– Psalm 71:20

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

– Psalm 30:3

Give us life, and we will call on your name. Restore us, YHWH God of hosts; let your face shine forth, and we will be saved.

– Psalm 80:18-19

Although he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

– Lamentations 3:32

⁴Restore us again, O God our Saviour*, and calm your indignation toward us.

⁵Will you be angry* with us forever? Will you prolong your anger from one generation to the next?

⁶Will you not change and give us life again, so that your people may rejoice in you?

⁷Show us your kindness*, YHWH*, and grant us your salvation*.

God's gift of peace

⁸Let me hear what God YHWH will speak, for he will speak peace* to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him with confident hearts*.

⁹Surely his salvation* is at hand for those who fear* him

so that his glory* may dwell in our land.

The psalmist is confident that YHWH will offer peace to the 'faithful' (ḥasîdîm), those who are open to God's loving kindness, who 'turn to God with confident hearts', who 'fear God'.

The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness will be quietness and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.

– Isaiah 32:17-18

We are assured that God holds out for us a future full of hope. By way of contrast let us reflect on the following:

We wait for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us ... Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands at a distance; for truth stumbles in the public square, and uprightness cannot enter. Truth is lacking, and whoever turns from evil is despoiled. YHWH saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice.

– Isaiah 59:11,14-15

The salvation that is 'at hand' was revealed finally in Jesus:

My eyes have seen your salvation.

– Luke 2:30 (Simeon)

Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.

– Acts 28:28 (Paul's last words in Acts)

Having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

– Hebrews 5:9

In Jesus, God's glory did dwell on earth.

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory' (Colossians 1:27).

The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

– 2Corinthians 4:4

When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

– Titus 3:4-6

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy.

– Luke 1:54

By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us.

– Luke 1:78

Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

– John 1:17

Jesus said to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

– John 14:6

In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit.

– Ephesians 1:13

Instead of ‘justice’ one could well say ‘righteousness’, as long as one remembers that ‘righteousness’ derives from two words: ‘right’ and ‘wise’. It means ‘wise as to what is right’, which in Biblical language means doing God’s will.

The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

– Romans 14:17

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!

– Luke 2:14

Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, Peace be with you.

– Luke 24:36

Peace be upon them, and mercy.

– Galatians 6:16

¹⁰Kindness* and faithfulness will meet;

justice* and peace* will embrace.

Responding to God's justice

¹¹Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and justice* looks down from the heavens.

Show, O heavens, from above, and let the skies rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation may spring up, and let it cause righteousness to sprout up also. I YHWH have created it.

– Isaiah 45:8

As the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so YHWH God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

– Isaiah 61:11

On that day I will answer, says YHWH. I will answer the heavens and they shall answer the earth; and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel [= YHWH sows]; and I will sow him for myself in the land. And I will have pity on Lo-ruhamah [= not pitied], and I will say to Lo-ammi [=not my people], 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God.

– Hosea 2:21-23

¹²YHWH will give prosperity, and our land will yield its harvest.

May there be abundance of grain in the land; waving to and fro to the tops of the mountains; may its fruit be luxuriant like that of Lebanon; and its sheaves like the grass of the field.

– Psalm 72:16

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

¹³Justice* will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.

God continues to journey with us.