

Psalm 118

Easter Vigil; 2nd Sunday of Easter Years A,B,C;
4th Sunday of Easter Year B
Morning Prayer Sunday Weeks 2&4
Prayer during the Day Easter & Pentecost
Evening Prayer for the Common of a Martyr
Sunday during the day weeks 1&3
Office of Readings Easter Thursday

This is a solemn liturgical hymn, celebrating military victory. It opens with a series of liturgical acclamations (compare Psalm 115:9-13 and Psalm 22:22-24).

¹Give thanks to YHWH*, for he is good; his kindness* endures forever!

²Let Israel say 'His kindness* endures forever'.

³Let the house of Aaron say 'His kindness* endures forever'.

⁴Let those who fear* YHWH say 'His kindness* endures forever'.

This is pronounced by the person who is leading the liturgy (compare Psalms 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 52:9; 54:6; 63:3-4; 69:16).

In verse 2 the Master of Ceremonies invites the congregation to repeat after him: 'His steadfast love endures forever.' We are to understand that this is what they do. In verse 3 he makes the same invitation to the priests, and in verse four to the people and the priests together: all who experience the awe ('fear') that is a gift from YHWH. See the article 'Fear of YHWH' in the Introduction. We are to imagine each group shouting out the words in response.

Fear YHWH, you his holy ones,
for those who fear him lack nothing.

– Psalm 34:9

The eye of YHWH is on those who fear him,
on those who hope in his kindness.

– Psalm 33:18

The kindness of YHWH always was and always will
be for those who fear him.

– Psalm 103:17 (see 103:11)

YHWH gives counsel to those who fear him,
and he instructs them through his covenant.
My eyes are fixed on YHWH; yes, he will disentangle
my feet from the net.

– Psalm 25:14-15

Praise YH! Happy is the person who fears YHWH,
who is enthusiastic about his commandments.

– Psalm 112:1

Happy is the person who fears YHWH,
and walks in his ways.

– Psalm 128:1

The king is thanking God for rescuing him. Verse 6 is quoted by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews:

He has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.' So we can say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can human beings do to me?'

– Hebrews 13:5-6

This is the response of the liturgical chorus to the king's words of thanksgiving.

Thus says YHWH: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortal human beings and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from YHWH. They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. Blessed are those who trust in YHWH, whose trust is YHWH.

– Jeremiah 17:5-7

I say, 'You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, you shall die like mortal human beings, and fall like any prince.'

– Psalm 82:6-7

Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal human beings, in whom there is no help.

– Psalm 146:3

In verses 10-14 the king enlarges on the victory that he achieved thanks to YHWH.

⁵I was hemmed in. I called on YHWH. YHWH answered me and set me in open space.

⁶With YHWH on my side, I do not fear what human beings can do to me?

⁷YHWH is on my side to help me; I shall look on the defeat of my enemies.

⁸It is better to take refuge in YHWH than to put confidence in human beings.

⁹It is better to take refuge in YHWH than to put confidence in princes.

¹⁰All the nations surrounded me; in the name of YHWH I repulsed them!

¹¹They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side; in the name of YHWH I repulsed them!

¹²They surrounded me like bees; they blazed like a fire of thorns; in the name of YHWH I repulsed them!

¹³I was hard pressed, so that I was falling, but YHWH strengthened me.

¹⁴YHWH is my strength and my might; he has become my saviour*.

YHWH brings victory

¹⁵There are glad songs of victory* in the tents of the righteous*: 'The right hand of YHWH does valiantly;

¹⁶the right hand of YHWH is exalted; the right hand of YHWH does valiantly.

¹⁷I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of YHWH.

¹⁸YHWH has punished me severely, but he did not give me over to death.

¹⁹Open to me the gates of righteousness*, that I may enter through them and give thanks to YHWH.

Once again responding to the king, the chorus recalls the celebration in the camp of the victory that was achieved through the power of YHWH.

YHWH is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.

– Exodus 15:2

Verses 17-19 are spoken by the king.

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

– Romans 6:9

We are treated as dying, and see - we are alive.

– 2Corinthians 6:9

Correct me, YHWH, but in just measure; not in your anger, or you will bring me to nothing.

– Jeremiah 10:24

I am with you, says YHWH, to save you; I will make an end of all the nations among which I scattered you, but of you I will not make an end. I will chastise you in just measure, and I will by no means leave you unpunished.

– Jeremiah 30:11 (see 46:28)

Remember the long way that YHWH your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments.

– Deuteronomy 8:2

... to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good.

– Deuteronomy 8:16

The Lord will not reject forever. Although he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

– Lamentations 3:31-32

Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may enter.

Who is the King of glory? YHWH, the valiant hero, YHWH, mighty in battle.

– Psalm 24:7-8

Open the gates, so that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in. Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace – in peace because they trust in you.

– Isaiah 26:2-3

This verse is spoken by those who have charge of opening the gate into the temple.

Spoken by the king.

You will say in that day: I will give thanks to you, YHWH, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, and you comforted me.

– Isaiah 12:1

Spoken by either the gatekeepers or the chorus.

See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: ‘Whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.’

– Isaiah 28:16

Verses 22-23 are quoted by Jesus in Mark 12:10 (= Matthew 2:42 = Luke 20:17). See also:

This Jesus is ‘the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.’ There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortal human beings by which we must be saved.

– Acts 4:11-12

It stands in scripture ‘See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame’ [Isaiah 28:16]. To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner.

– 1Peter 2:6-7

You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in YHWH; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

– Ephesians 2:19-22

Spoken by the chorus:

Proclaim his justice to a people yet unborn, saying, ‘This is what he has done’.

– Psalm 22:31

²⁰This is the gate of YHWH; the righteous* shall enter through it.

²¹I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation*.

²²The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

²³This is YHWH’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.

²⁴This is the day that YHWH has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

The steadfast love of YHWH

²⁵Save* us, we beseech you, YHWH! YHWH, we beseech you, give us success!

²⁶Blessed* in the name of YHWH is the one who comes. We bless* you from the house of YHWH.

²⁷YHWH is God, and he has given us light.

^{27b}Organise a festival procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.

²⁸You are my God, I give thanks to you; you are my God, I extol you.

²⁹O give thanks to YHWH, for he is good, for his kindness* endures forever.

Spoken by the chorus. The Hebrew translated here as ‘save us’ is *hōšî‘â nā’* [הוֹשִׁיעָה נָא], whence the English ‘hosanna’.

Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them, YHWH bless you and keep you; YHWH make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; YHWH lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

– Numbers 6:23-26

Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of YHWH! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!’

– Mark 11:9-10 (= Matthew 21:9 = Luke 19:38)

So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of YHWH – the King of Israel!’

– John 12:13

You will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of YHWH.’

– Matthew 23:39

Your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of YHWH.’

– Luke 13:35

It is you, YHWH, who light my lamp; my God, you clear away my darkness.

– Psalm 18:28

YHWH is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? YHWH is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

– Psalm 27:1

Verse 27 is an Instruction given by the Master of Ceremonies (see verses 1-4).

There was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.

– Revelation 7:9

Verse 28 is spoken by the king, and in verse 29 the whole assembly repeats the opening verse of the psalm.