

Psalm 103

- 1. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name.*
- 2. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.*
- 3. Who forgives all your sins and heals all your infirmities;*
- 4. Who redeems your life from the Pit
and crowns you with faithful love and compassion;*
- 5. Who satisfies you with good things, so that your youth is renewed like an eagle's.*
- 6. The Lord executes righteousness and judgement for all who are oppressed.*
- 7. He made his way known to Moses and his works to the children of Israel.*
- 8. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and of great kindness.*
- 9. He will not always accuse us, neither will he keep his anger for ever.*
- 10. He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
nor rewarded us according to our wickedness.*
- 11. For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his mercy upon those who fear him.*
- 12. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he set our sins from us.*
- 13. As a father has compassion on his children,
so is the Lord merciful towards those who fear him.*
- 14. For he knows of what we are made; he remembers that we are but dust.*
- 15. Our days are but as grass; we flourish as a flower of the field;*
- 16. For as soon as the wind goes over it, it is gone,
and its place shall know it no more.*
- 17. But the merciful goodness of the Lord is from of old
and endures for ever on those who fear him,
and his righteousness on children's children.*

18. *On those who keep his covenant and remember his commandments to do them.*

19. *The Lord has established his throne in heaven
and his kingdom has dominion over all.*

20. *Bless the Lord, you angels of his, you mighty ones who do his bidding
and hearken to the voice of his word.*

21. *Bless the Lord, all you his hosts, you ministers of his who do his will.*

22. *Bless the Lord, all you works of his, in all places of his dominion;
bless the Lord, O my soul.*

Refrain

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy,
slow to anger and of great kindness.

Psalm 103 is a hymn for the presentation of a thank offering. In the first part, vv. 1-5, the psalmist's whole being gratefully acknowledges God's holy name, that is, his saving presence. God's love has come to him in many ways, in forgiveness, healing, rescue from death. His long life has remained as strong as that of an eagle, an image, which can be found in Isaiah 40, 'But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.'

The Pit refers to the underworld, where one's existence would be reduced to almost vanishing point. It was thought that God's presence did not reach this dark, dismal place. But for the psalmist in Psalm 103, God's compassion saves us from that fate. (v.4, 'who redeems your life from the Pit and crowns you with faithful love and compassion.')

In the second part, vv.6-18, the psalmist rehearses the benefits, which he has received. God's justice is shown towards the oppressed (v.6), which means his saving love. God delivered his people from Egypt and gave them the law through Moses. (v.7, 'He made his ways known to Moses and his works to the children of Israel.')

Though God may punish, his anger does not last long. But his steadfast love is immense, eternal and unchanging. (v.9, 'He will not always accuse us, neither will he keep his anger for ever.' And v.17, 'But the merciful goodness of the Lord is from of old and endures for ever on those who fear him.')

God knows our frail existence and pities those who worship him with a father's compassion. Because he understands,

he forgives to the uttermost. (v.12, 'As far as the east is from the west, so far has he set our sins from us.')

The last section, vv.19-22, is a call to praise for members of the heavenly council, all creation and the psalmist himself. The heavenly council can be seen in Psalm 82: 'God has taken his stand in the council of heaven; in the midst of the gods he gives judgement.'

These characteristics of God are embodied in the person of Jesus, who comes to reveal God to us and to show us how to love. He came to share our lives, to show what it means to be human and to show that God loves us, whoever we are.

vv.8, 13-17 are used in the funeral service at the Committal. These verses contrast the shortness of our lives with the eternal love and goodness of God. So, as God is present with us at all times, revealed in the person of Jesus, we are asked to follow his way, to be people of love and compassion and to reveal the love of God in our relationships with one another.

Prayer

Heavenly Father,
we have known and believed the love you have for us.
May we, dwelling in love, dwell in you, and you in us.
So fashion us after your own way of love,
and so shed that love abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit,
that we may abound in love, to the glory of your name.
Amen.

(New Every Morning)