**Psalm 116**

*1. I love the Lord, for he has heard the voice of my supplication;*

*because he inclined his ear to me on the day I called to him.*

*2. The snares of death encompassed me; the pains of hell took hold of me;*

*by grief and sorrow was I held.*

*3. Then I called upon the name of the Lord; ‘O Lord, I beg you, deliver my soul.’*

*4. Gracious is the Lord and righteous; our God is full of compassion.*

*5. The Lord watches over the simple; I was brought very low and he saved me.*

*6. Turn again to your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has been gracious to you.*

*7. For you have delivered my soul from death,*

*my eyes from tears and my feet from falling.*

*8. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.*

*9. I believed that I should perish for I was sorely troubled;*

*and I said in my alarm, ‘Everyone is a liar.’*

*10. How shall I repay the Lord for all the benefits he has given to me?*

*11. I will lift up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord.*

*12. I will fulfil my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.*

*13. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful servants.*

*14. O Lord, I am your servant, your servant, the child of your handmaid;*

*you have freed me from my bonds.*

*15. I will offer you a sacrifice of thanksgiving and call upon the name of the Lord.*

*16. I will fulfil my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people,*

*17. In the courts of the house of the Lord, in the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Alleluia.*

**Refrain**

I will lift up the cup of salvation:

**and call upon the name of the Lord.**

Psalm 116 is an individual thanksgiving. It begins with a cry of gratitude and love for what God has done. (v.1, ‘I love the Lord, for he has heard the voice of my supplication.’ The psalmist was near death, perhaps from an illness and the Lord heard his cry.) In v. 2, ‘The snares of death encompassed me; the pains of hell took hold of me’,there is a reference to Sheol, the underworld and to snares, an animal trap. So, the psalmist felt while he was ill that he was trapped and cut off from God.

In vv. 5-9, the psalmist rejoices, because he thinks that his deliverance reveals the gracious character of God. (v.4, ’Gracious is the Lord and righteous; our God is full of compassion.’) God is the champion of the simple, those who are unable to fend for themselves. (v.5, ‘The Lord watches over the simple; I was brought very low and he saved me.’) So, God acts towards them with justice, which saves those, who are

oppressed, and mercy, because he understands their situation. (v.7, ‘For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears and my feet from falling.’)

Now his soul is to rest. (v.6, ‘Turn again to your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has been gracious to you.’) His soul, that is, his total personality as a living being, has been in disorder. A similar idea can be found in Psalm 6, ‘Have mercy on me Lord, for I am weak; Lord, heal me, for my bones are racked. My soul also shakes with terror; how long, O Lord, how long?’ (vv.2,3)

However, even in his distress the psalmist didn’t lose his faith. Rather, he learnt that trust in human power is a vain hope. (vv. 8,9, ‘I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living. I believed that I should perish for I was sorely troubled; I said in my alarm, “Everyone is a liar.”’)

The last section, (vv.10-end) is spoken just before the presentation of a thank offering. The cup of salvation (v.11, ‘I will take up the cup of salvation’) was probably held up in front of the altar and offered as a drink offering. It is the opposite of the cup of wrath in Psalm 75, ‘For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, well mixed and full of foaming wine. He pours it out for all the wicked of the earth; they shall drink it, and drain the dregs.’ The worshipper pays his vows and offers the thank offering.

In v.13 it is made clear that God is not indifferent to whether his servants are killed. ‘Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful servants.’

V.14, (‘O Lord, I am your servant, your servant, the child of your handmaid’) means that, just as the child of a female slave was the property of her master, the psalmist will remain God’s servant as long as he lives.

At the end of a war, the nation rejoices, special services are organised, and people give thanks to God for victory and liberation. If we have been very ill and finally recover, we feel set free, liberated, and we thank God for our life and for the restoration of health. Similarly, if we have been faced with a difficult problem and eventually find a solution, we feel set free and rejoice.

In all these situations, we may feel that we have been given something, which we cannot repay, the gift of peace, health, or, in the case of problems, a feeling that we have learnt something, that we have grown in some way and, maybe, that we have been granted wisdom.

What is our reaction? Perhaps the most important verses in Psalm 116 are vv.10 and 11, ‘How shall I repay the Lord for all the benefits he has given to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord.’

We come, Sunday by Sunday, to the Eucharist, where the cup is lifted up and poured out. It is for us the greatest blessing, a time when we receive the very life of God in the bread and wine, an act of love from the God who loves us, whoever we are, something, which we cannot repay, except, perhaps, by being faithful and by coming week by week to share in this greatest of the acts of God and giving thanks, like the psalmist, for God’s name, his eternal presence among us.

It is all summed up in Eucharistic Prayer D:

‘May we and all who share this food offer ourselves to live for you and be welcomed at your feast in heaven where all creation worships you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’

**Prayers**

Almighty and everlasting God,

increase in us your gift of faith

that, forsaking what lies behind

and reaching out to that which is before,

we may run the way of your commandments

and win the crown of everlasting joy;

through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with you,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever.

**Amen.**

(Collect, Trinity 18)

We praise and thank you, O Christ, for this sacred feast:

for here we receive you,

here the memory of your passion is renewed,

here our minds are filled with grace,

and here a pledge of future glory is given,

when we shall feast at that table where you reign

with all your saints for ever.

**Amen.**

(Post Communion Collect, Trinity 18)