



SCRIPTURE READING: Psalm 116

This psalm of thanksgiving rejoices in the fact that our God hears and answers prayer. And God answers us especially when we find ourselves in dire situations. Here, the psalmist felt as though “the snares of death encompassed me,” as though he were being dragged down to the grave. He cried out to God and God answered him—“you have delivered my soul from death.”

In response, the psalmist longs to praise God, to lift up the cup of salvation, to call upon the name of the Lord, and to cause others to rejoice in him. Twice, in the latter half of the psalm, you see this chorus: “I will...call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people” (116:13-14, 17-18). This teaches us that praise is best offered together, not alone. When we know deliverance from this present distress, we will come together with great praise. And we will shout, “All praise to God, who reigns above, the God of wonders, power, and love—to God all praise and glory!”

HYMN: “ALL PRAISE TO GOD, WHO REIGNS ABOVE” *Trinity Hymnal* 4

All praise to God, who reigns above, the God of all creation, the God of wonders, pow’r, and love, the God of our salvation!
With healing balm my soul he fills, the God who every sorrow stills. To God all praise and glory!

What God’s almighty pow’r hath made his gracious mercy keepeth; by morning dawn or evening shade his watchful eye
ne’er sleepeth; within the kingdom of his might, lo, all is just and all is right. To God all praise and glory!

I cried to him in time of need: Lord God, O hear my calling! For death he gave me life indeed and kept my feet from falling.
For this my thanks shall endless be; O thank him, thank our God with me. To God all praise and glory!

The Lord forsaketh not his flock, his chosen generation; he is their refuge and their rock, their peace and their salvation.
As with a mother’s tender hand he leads his own, his chosen band. To God all praise and glory!

Ye who confess Christ’s holy name, to God give praise and glory! Ye who the Father’s pow’r proclaim, to God give praise
and glory! All idols underfoot be trod, the Lord is God! The Lord is God! To God all praise and glory!

Then come before his presence now and banish fear and sadness; to your Redeemer pay your vow and sing with joy and
gladness: though great distress my soul befell, the Lord, my God, did all things well. To God all praise and glory!

PRAYER: (from *Psalms for All Seasons*, p. 730)

Compassionate God, you protect us from unseen danger and catch us when we stumble and fall. You answer when we call to you in prayer. Help our worship of you to be sacrificial and our vows to you to be sincere, serving and rejoicing because of you as long as we live. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

CATECHISM: Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 28

How does the knowledge of God’s creation and providence help us?

We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing in creation will separate us from his love. For all creatures are so completely in God’s hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved.



SCRIPTURE READING: Proverbs 3:1-12

Central to this parental appeal in Proverbs are verses 5-10. As the father seeks his son's good, he first urges him to trust in the Lord. Notice, though, that this trust is total ("with all your heart") and exclusive ("do not lean on your own understanding"). All too often, we are less than total and exclusive in our allegiance to God; yet, it is best for us to trust in the Lord.

Next, he presses him to fear the Lord. Colloquially, we could say that the fear of the Lord means we have our eyes on God, knowing God has his eyes on us. This is a reverence that comes from knowing we live *coram Deo* (before the face of God)—a good way of life involves trusting the Lord and fearing the Lord.

Finally, he exhorts him to honor the Lord with our money. Our money isn't God; God is God—and the way we show ourselves and God that we believe this is that we freely give our money away. God promises to provide for us—so honoring him with our money actually shows that we are trusting and fearing him. This is the good life, the life that every father wants his children to know.

HYMN: "THE LAW OF THE LORD IS PERFECT" *Trinity Hymnal 152*

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.
More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold.
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.
The commandments of the Lord are pure, enlight'ning the eyes.
More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold.
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever.
The judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold.
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

PRAYER: (from *Daily Prayer*, ed. Frank Topping, p. 166-67)

Almighty Father, who in your great mercy gladdened the disciples with the sight of the risen Lord: give us such a knowledge of his presence with us, that we may be strengthened and sustained by his risen life and serve you continually in righteousness and truth. You have given your only Son to be for us both a sacrifice for sin and an example of godly life; may you give us grace that we may always thankfully receive his immeasurable benefits, and daily endeavor to following his steps, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we pray, Amen.

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SCRIPTURE READING: Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Many of us are familiar with this chapter—if we haven't read it, perhaps we have heard the song written by The Byrds in the 1960s and covered by many musicians ("Turn! Turn! Turn!"). One of the things that comes clear about this chapter is that it deals with time. The first eight verses, we learn about God's time. He is the one who establishes the seasons and times for every matter under heaven. That means that nothing happens in our lives by accident or chance. Rather, God crafted these moments for us and us for these moments. Yet that also means that every day is pregnant with meaning and possibility—even days when we are trapped inside or forced into a series of events that are not ones we might choose.

In fact, God is active in our times. He is the one who has given business to humans; he is the one who makes everything beautiful in its time; and he is the one who has purposes that we cannot discern. And his purpose is that we might live lives of joyful service and trusting reverence all of our days. God is the one who makes our hearts restless and he is the one who gives us rest. We can be patient because our times are in his good hands.

HYMN: "MY TIMES ARE IN THY HAND" *Trinity Hymnal 684* (Tune: St. Thomas)

My times are in thy hand; my God, I wish them there;
my life, my friends, my soul, I leave entirely to thy care.

My times are in thy hand, whatever they may be;
pleasing or painful, dark or bright, as best may seem to thee.

My times are in thy hand; why should I doubt or fear?
My Father's hand will never cause his child a needless tear.

My times are in thy hand, Jesus the Crucified;
those hands my cruel sins had pierced are now my guard and guide.

PRAYER:

Lord, my times are in your hands and I wish them there. To be sure, there are many times that I want to seize control and to protect my life, my friends, my soul. Yet Lord, you care for these things better than I ever could. Your hands are strong; mine are weak. Your hands are wise; mine are foolish. Your hands are good; mine are fallible and fallen. Above all, yours are the hands that bear the marks of crucifixion—nails that my sins drove home, that your love endured. I can trust your hands, and I entrust all of my life to your keeping, in Jesus' name, Amen.

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SCRIPTURE READING: Psalm 131

Psalm 131 is one of those “songs of ascent” that God’s people would sing during their pilgrimages to Jerusalem. It is a short yet powerful song of trust in God. First, the psalmist declares what he is not: his heart is not lifted up; his eyes are not raised too high; he does not occupy himself with great things, with God-level things. In other words, he recognizes that he is not God, that he is only a man, that he cannot control his world.

But then he goes on to declare what he is: he is calm and quiet before the Lord. In fact, like a child that has just nursed and fallen asleep, so the psalmist pictures himself to be. Cared for and well-fed by a great God who loves him—that’s how his soul is even though there are dangers around, even though there are reasons to be scared. This is what hope looks like—hoping in God is the earnest expectation that God will rule over all things in such a way that they will be for my salvation. When we hope in God, we can rest easily in his hands.

HYMN: “JESUS, I AM RESTING” Smith (also *Trinity Hymnal* 188)

Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what thou art; I am finding out the greatness of thy loving heart.
Thou hast bid me gaze upon thee, as thy beauty fills my soul, for by thy transforming power, thou hast made me whole.
Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what thou art; I am finding out the greatness of thy loving heart.

O how great thy loving-kindness, vaster, broader than the sea! O how marvelous thy goodness lavished all on me!
Yes, I rest in thee, Beloved, know what wealth of grace is thine, know thy certainty of promise and have made it mine.
Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what thou art; I am finding out the greatness of thy loving heart.

Simply trusting thee, Lord Jesus, I behold thee as thou art, and thy love, so pure, so changeless, satisfies my heart;
satisfies its deepest longings, meets, supplies its ev’ry need, compasseth me round with blessings: thine is love indeed.
Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what thou art; I am finding out the greatness of thy loving heart.

Ever lift thy face upon me as I work and wait for thee; resting ‘neath thy smile, Lord Jesus, earth’s dark shadows flee.
Brightness of my Father’s glory, sunshine of my Father’s face, keep me ever trusting, resting, fill me with thy grace.
Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what thou art; I am finding out the greatness of thy loving heart.

PRAYER:

O Jesus, I am resting in the joy of who you are; I am finding out the greatness of your loving heart. You have bid me to gaze upon you, to let your beauty fill my soul; by your transforming power, you are making me whole. So, I am simply trusting in you, Lord Jesus; I desire to behold you as you are, so that your love, so pure and changeless, might satisfy my heart. Always lift your face upon me, Lord, as I work and wait for you; when I’m resting beneath your smile, all the shadows go. Fill me with your grace as I rest in you, Amen.

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SCRIPTURE READING: John 15:1-11

Right in the middle of Jesus' discourse in the Upper Room, he uses this imagery that would have been familiar to the disciples. After all, Isaiah 5 had taught them that Israel was the vine and the Lord himself was the vinedresser. Here, though, Jesus tells his disciples that he is the True Vine—where Israel faltered and failed, Jesus succeeds. But also, Jesus is able to sustain the lives of his people—all those connected to him are God's own people.

And so, he calls us to abide. Ten times between verses 4 and 11, the word *abide* appears. But what does it mean for us to abide or remain in the vine? Abiding in Jesus is loving him, delighting in him, desiring him, and keeping his words in the full scope of his revelation. Jesus tells his disciples to have his words abide in them (15:7) and to keep his commandments and so abide in his love (15:9-10). So abiding in Jesus is what we are called to do. And those who abide in Jesus will bear fruit (15:4-5) and prove to be his disciples (15:8). The result of all of this is joy—Jesus' own joy becoming our own.

HYMN: "ABIDE WITH ME" Smith (also *Trinity Hymnal* 402)

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide; the darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee, help of the helpless, abide with me.

I need thy presence, every passing hour; what but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who, like thyself, my guide and stay can be? Through cloud and sunshine, abide with me.

I fear no foe with thee at hand to bless: ills have no weight, tears lose their bitterness.
Where is thy sting death? Where grave thy victory? I triumph still, abide with me.

Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes; shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies:
heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee: in life, in death, Lord, abide with me.

PRAYER:

Lord, I need you to abide with me. I need to know your presence, your grace, your blessing. I need you to remind me of your cross, not only on my dying day, but every day. But Lord, I also need to abide in you. I need your Word to dwell in my heart richly, your Word to provide my daily songs, your Word to set the path for my feet. Grant me grace to take your Word into my very self so that I might keep your commands. Above all, grant me your own joy, the joy of the Father by your Spirit through the Son, in whose name I pray, Amen.

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SCRIPTURE READING: Hebrews 12:1-13

I don't know if you've read Sheldon Vanauken's memoir, *A Severe Mercy*. He tells the story of his love and marriage to his wife Jean (whom he called Davy). As Van and Davy fell in love, they developed an almost obsessive plan for maintaining that love; they called it "the Shining Barrier," a wall that would prevent separateness and bind their hearts together forever. But as they went to Oxford for graduate school, they came under the influence of C. S. Lewis. Eventually, they both committed themselves to Christ.

Tragically, after this, Davy developed a liver condition that took her life. As Van mourned, he received a letter from Lewis that shaped his understanding of what had happened. Lewis wrote, "One way or another the thing [their obsessive love] had to die. Perpetual springtime is not allowed... You have been treated with a severe mercy. You have been brought to see (how true and how very frequent this is!) that you were jealous of God. So from US, you have been led back to US AND GOD; it remains to go on to GOD AND US."

What Hebrews 12 teaches us is that God loves us so much that he set his own Son to win salvation for his own, despising the shame of the cross. But for his own whom he saves, he also loves us so much that he is willing to discipline his sons and daughters—to treat us with severe mercy—so that we will love him more than any other thing. It is only as we love God as we ought that all our other loves will be rightly ordered.

HYMN: "BE STILL, MY SOUL" *Trinity Hymnal* 689

Be still, my soul: the Lord is on your side; bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
leave to your God to order and provide; in ev'ry change he faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul: your best, your heav'nly Friend through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Be still, my soul: your God will undertake to guide the future as he has the past.
Your hope, your confidence let nothing shake; all now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul: the waves and winds still know his voice who ruled them while he dwelt below.

Be still, my soul: when dearest friends depart, and all is darkened in the vale of tears,
then shall you better know his love, his heart, who comes to soothe your sorrow and your fears.
Be still, my soul: your Jesus can repay from his own fullness all he takes away.

Be still, my soul: the hour is hast'ning on when we shall be forever with the Lord,
when disappointment, grief, and fear are gone, sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.
Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past, all safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

PRAYER:

O Lord, still my soul. Let me believe that you are on my side. Grant grace to bear patiently the cross of grief and pain. When my dearest friends depart and all is darkened in the vale of tears, let me hear your voice calming my tumultuous soul. I do trust you, Lord, to guide the future as you have the past, even if that future has sadness and sorrow and severe mercies. When I come to those days—or even my last day—let me be still before you, knowing that I am completely in your hand, which is the safest place to be. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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SCRIPTURE READING: 1 Peter 5:1-11

It has always struck me that when Peter speaks about his authority in his two letters, he always does so from the standpoint of being a fellow elder. In fact, though he is a fisherman by trade, he readily identifies as a shepherd. He reminds the other elders that their ministry is to “shepherd the flock of God that is among you.” That means that elders provide constant care for God’s people; he searches out for them; he seeks them out when they’ve wandered off; he protects them. But his manner is Christlike—it is willing, eager, gracious; he serves as an example of faithful love and care.

And the sheep are to respond to this care: “be subject to the elders.” Line yourself up under them; be humble towards them and towards God. Such is the way of life in the church: God’s people cared for by elders who pursue them; God’s people protected from the adversaries around them; God’s people knowing Christ’s own blessing through these men until Christ returns to “Restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” Pray for your elders and pray that together we would be cared for by them as by Christ himself.

HYMN: “THE LORD’S MY SHEPHERD, I’LL NOT WANT” *Trinity Hymnal 87*

The Lord’s my Shepherd, I’ll not want;
he makes me down to lie in pastures green;
he leadeth me the quiet waters by.

My soul he doth restore again;
and me to walk doth make within the paths of righteousness,
e’en for his own name’s sake.

Yea, though I walk in death’s dark vale,
yet will I fear none ill, for thou art with me;
and thy rod and staff me comfort still.

My table thou hast furnished in presence of my foes;
my head thou dost with oil anoint,
and my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me:
and in God’s house forevermore
my dwelling place shall be.

PRAYER:

O eternal and merciful God, I give eternal thanks to you that so far you have guarded me from countless evils and provided me with protection of your holy angels. Your gracious acts by which you protected me from evil are even more numerous than the acts by which you give good things to me. Chief among these are granting me elders who seek to shepherd my soul, who warn me of the devil and his devices, who pursue me when I wander away, and who love me even when I’m not always loveable. Grant them grace to continue to care for me and for our church so that you might be glorified, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

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