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Psalm 145
A Song of Praise. Of David.
(RSV) (Revised Common Lectionary)

Introduction to Psalm 145

It will be useful to notice how in this Psalm David alternates between prayer *to* God and praise *of* God. In verses 1-7, 10-13a, and 15-16, David addresses the LORD by speaking to him in a very personal relationship. These verse sections alternate with verses 8-9, 13b-14, and 17-20, in which David speaks about the LORD in an almost creedal fashion.

(Address to the LORD)

Vv. 1-7

- ¹ I will extol thee, my God and King,
and bless thy name for ever and ever.**
**² Every day I will bless thee,
and praise thy name for ever and ever.**

King David acknowledges that he himself also has a King, namely, God. Notice also that the praise of God is a daily exercise, and continues into eternity.

- ³ Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised,
and his greatness is unsearchable.**

The greatness of the LORD is, and is to be, the measure of our praise; yet paradoxically that very greatness goes beyond our powers of comprehension.

- ⁴ One generation shall laud thy works to another,
and shall declare thy mighty acts.**

The praise of God is, and is to be, inter-generational. The echo of the praises of God reverberates down through the generations, as parents teach their children to praise God, and children's children continue the chorus of praise. Children learn to praise God from the parents' habit of doing so.

- ⁵ In the glorious splendor of thy majesty,
and on thy wondrous works, I will meditate.**

All the other verbs of this section (verses 1-7) are more or less synonymous: extol, bless, praise, laud, declare, proclaim, pour forth, sing aloud. They tumble over one another as in a torrent in an effort to harness the power of the language to the wonder of God's splendor and majesty. But here, in this verse, the verb is more quiet; here the Psalmist calls on us to meditate. The life of the believer is, and is to be, like that: unending daily public praise alternating with private reflection on all God's mercies.

- ⁶ Men** (all people) **shall proclaim the might of thy terrible** (awe-inspiring) **acts,**
and I will declare thy greatness.
⁷ They shall pour forth (celebrate by reciting) **the fame** (narrative remembrance)
of thy abundant goodness,
and shall sing loud of thy righteousness.

The premier terrible act was the LORD's rescue of Israel from the mighty Pharaoh of Egypt.

"Goodness" and "righteousness" are parallel ideas, and mutually condition one another. The goodness of God always includes His righteousness, and His righteousness always includes His goodness. What is so right about God is that He is always so good; and what is so good about God is that He is always so right.

(Witness to the LORD)

Vv. 8-9

- ⁸ The LORD is gracious and merciful,**
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Recall Psalm 103:8-13 as a kind of commentary on this verse. See also Exodus 33:12-23.

- ⁹ The LORD is good to all,**
and his compassion is over all that he has made.

The mercy and the compassion (a virtual synonym for mercy) of the LORD are directed to all His creatures, evil or good, righteous or unrighteous, without distinction or discrimination. Think here of the sayings of Jesus about loving our enemies in Matthew 5:43-48.

(Address to the LORD)

Vv. 10-13a

- ¹⁰ All thy works shall give thanks to thee,**
O LORD, and all thy saints shall bless thee!

Just as in verse 9, the LORD's compassion is over all that He has made, so also will thanksgiving be made to Him by all His works. When the People of God (the saints) join to bless God, they do so in company with all of God's creation. Perhaps we may say that God's People lead the rest of the creation in that joyful duty, and that we do now already what in the End God's whole universe shall finally do. The daily worship of God is not wasted time; it is rather the anticipation of the fundamental activity of heaven.

- ¹¹ They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom** (royal power, or the
exercise of power),
and tell of thy power,

The LORD has limitless power; but in the hands of One who is also gracious and merciful such power is not threatening, but a consolation. The mercy of the LORD is not powerless compassion, but He is mighty to save. Where there is divine Power, there is also divine Compassion; and where there is divine Compassion there is also divine Power. That is the glory of the LORD.

**12 to make known to the sons of men (all people) thy mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendor of thy kingdom.**

That in the End, "all Thy works shall praise thy name in earth and sky and sea," is a part of the good news which the People of God have to proclaim to all people.

**13a Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and thy dominion endures throughout all generations.**

This verse is almost identical to the wording in Daniel 4:3 & 4:34b. To praise God is to acknowledge that He alone rules eternally. This relativizes every other rule and authority. There is also an implied polemic here against any other so-called gods and other so-called lords (see also 1 Corinthians 8:5-6). These and similar verses are the inspiration for the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, not given by Jesus but added almost immediately afterwards by the early church: "For, O Father in heaven, Thine alone is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever."

(Witness to the LORD)

Vv. 13b-14

**13b The LORD is faithful in (to) all his words (of promise),
and gracious (showing corresponding love) in all his deeds.**

In God the word and the deed coincide; what He says He does. And when He promises mercy and goodness, He shows them in His deeds.

**14 The LORD upholds all who are falling,
and raises up all who are bowed down.**

The LORD is compassionate to all (verse 9); all of us are falling, all of us feel beaten down, and all of us experience trouble. The LORD's goodness is marvelously tailored to meet human need.

(Address to the LORD)

Vv. 15-16

**15 The eyes of all look to thee,
and thou givest them their food in due season.**

**16 Thou openest thy hand (in generosity),
thou satisfiest the desire of every living thing (all living creatures).**

The "creed" of verses 13b-14 leads to, and shapes, the praise of verses 15-16. In a similar manner every Christian Creed, or recital of God's word and work is to lead to, and shape, also the language of praise.

(Witness to the LORD)

Vv. 17-21

**¹⁷ The LORD is just in all his ways,
and kind in all his doings.**

As in verse 7, "Goodness" and "Righteousness" are doxologically yoked, that is, come together in praise, so also are God's Justice and Kindness.

¹⁸ The LORD is near (attentive, ready to respond) **to all who call upon him,
to all who call upon him in truth** (sincerity).

When truth is here invoked, it is hard not to hear Psalm 51:6: "You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart."

To call upon the LORD in truth requires not merely an inner sincere intention, but also a full recognition of the truth of God and our relation to Him. The preface to this truth is the fulsome praise of God and of His demonstrated attributes that have been the subject of this Psalm. And corresponding to that truth about God is the corollary truth about us, that we are the fallen and the troubled. This excludes all false pride and false modesty, and requires that we "come clean." To praise the LORD as the Savior from sin is by that fact also to acknowledge that we are the sinners.

To call upon the LORD in supplication, that is, in petition to ask Him for blessings, is entirely appropriate after our prayer of praise.

**¹⁹ He fulfills the desire of all who fear him,
he also hears their cry, and saves them.**

This is an echo of verse 16b, except for a significant modification: "all living things" have become "all those who fear Him." All things do not yet fear Him; hence we need to recall also verses 11-12. To "fear the LORD" is to stand in proper and respectful awe of the One who in His dealings with us displays the perfect harmony of power and compassion and righteousness. Such fear of the LORD also purifies our desire. Here "calling upon the LORD" becomes a crying out to the LORD. And the promise is that the LORD will hear such a crying out.

**²⁰ The LORD preserves all who love him;
but all the wicked he will destroy.**

"All who fear" the LORD are now also referred to as "all who love" the LORD. Recall how Luther begins the explanation of each of the Commandments by saying, "We should fear and love God..." To love is to be utterly loyal to the LORD, and to no one else. Those whom the LORD saves (verse 19) He also preserves. The wicked are now seen as those who refuse to heed the appeal of verses 11-13, those who in their allegiance to other gods and lords are swept away with them in the LORD's determination to be LORD alone.

**²¹ My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD,
and let all flesh bless his Holy Name for ever and ever.**

The reference to the Holy Name of the LORD, recalls God's self-revelation as the great and mysterious I AM WHO I AM (Exodus 3:13ff), and the further revelation of God's character in Exodus 34:5-7. Whoever prays this Psalm ends with the promise always to praise the LORD, and prays as well that everyone everywhere also learn to do so.

The prayer from the LBW to accompany Psalm 145:

Loving Father, you are faithful in your promises and tender in your compassion. Listen to our hymn of joy, and continue to satisfy the needs of all your creatures, that all flesh may bless your name in your everlasting kingdom, where with your Son and the Holy Spirit you live and reign, now and forever. Amen.

Some further Reflections:

The alternation of "prayer" and "creed" in this Psalm is instructive. It has long been recognized in the Church that the *lex orandi* is the *lex credendi*. That is Latin for saying that the way we pray is the window into the way we believe. And of course it also works the other way around; the way we believe will also affect the way we pray. Thus, not only does prayer shape our faith, but faith shapes our prayer. That's why we can and should pray the Apostles and the Nicene Creed. That will insure that our prayers are not merely asking; that we are also praising and blessing God. The Creeds are a high form of the praise of God. We may say, for example:

“We praise you, O God, our Almighty Father, for you have created us and all creatures. We praise you, O Lord Jesus Christ, only son of God, for you were born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, were crucified for us and for our salvation, raised on the third day to live and intercede for us forever. We praise you, O Holy and Life-giving Spirit, that you have called us into the Church and the communion of your saints.”

Once you get the hang of it, you will find your own variations in praying the Creeds and the explanations of the Creeds that Luther has given us.

Consider further verse 10. If indeed all God's works, the whole Creation, shall one day praise Him, then when we Christians praise God, we do so as the first-fruits, the pledge and the token of the others yet to follow. It is as if, when we praise God, we were saying, "Dear LORD, you hear and see only us so far. But there are more to come. We are only the beginning; all your creation will praise you tomorrow. We are praying (verse 21), and we are working (verses 11-12), to bring it about. In the meantime, when you hear our daily praise, receive it, dear LORD, on behalf also of all those yet to come." This makes our prayers for others not only prayers *for* others in the sense of *for their benefit*, but also *for* them in the sense of *in their stead*.

Nugget

Blake wrote the Marriage of Heaven and Hell. If I have written of their Divorce, this is not because I think myself a fit antagonist for so great a genius, nor even because I feel at all sure that I know what he meant. But in some sense or other the attempt to make that marriage is perennial. The attempt is based on the belief that reality never presents us with an absolutely unavoidable “either-or”; that, granted skill and patience and (above all) time enough, some way of embracing both alternatives can always be found; that mere development or adjustment or refinement will somehow turn evil into good without being called on for a final and total rejection of anything we should like to retain. This belief I take to be a disastrous error. You cannot take all luggage with you on all journeys; on one journey even your right hand and your right eye may be among the things you have to leave behind. We are not living in a world where all roads are radii of a circle and where all, if followed enough, will therefore draw gradually nearer and finally meet at the center; rather in a world where every road, after a few miles, forks into two, and each of those two again, and at each fork you must make a decision.

I do not think that all who choose wrong roads perish; but their rescue consists in being put back on the right road. A wrong sum can be put right, but only by going back till you find the error and working it afresh from that point, never by simply going on. Evil can be undone, but it cannot “develop” into good. Time does not heal it. The spell must be unwound, bit by bit, “with backward mutters of dis severing power” – or else not. It is still “either-or.” If we insist on keeping Hell (or even earth) we shall not see Heaven; if we accept Heaven we shall not be able to retain even the smallest and most intimate souvenirs of Hell. I believe, to be sure, that any man who reaches heaven will find that what he abandoned (even in plucking out his right eye) was precisely nothing; that the kernel of what he was really seeking even in his most depraved wishes will be there, beyond expectations, waiting for him in “the High countries.” In that sense it will be true for those who have completed the journey (and for no others) to say that good is everything and Heaven everywhere. But we, at this end of the road, must not try to anticipate that retrospective vision. If we do, we are likely to embrace the false and disastrous converse and fancy that everything is good and everywhere Heaven.

C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*

Walter E. Keller

July 4, 1999 – **The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost**

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