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Psalm 146

Walter E. Keller
Valparaíso University

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Psalm 146

(RSV) (LW Lectionary)

Vv. 1-2

¹ **Praise the LORD!**

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

² **I will praise the LORD as long as I live;**

I will sing praises to my God while I have being.

Vv. 3-4

³ **Put not your trust in princes** (and, by extension, any earthly authority),
in a son of man (a mere human being), **in whom there is no** (lasting) **help.**

⁴ **When his breath** (his life) **departs he returns to his earth;**
on that very day his plans (intentions, projects) **perish.**

You should praise and trust the one who is trustworthy. Princes, rulers, the political process all have only limited helpfulness, because they are all finite and mortal as everything on earth is. None of these can save, and all will perish and return to dust (Genesis 3:19). Unlimited helpfulness can come only from the ONE who has the creative power of the LORD and who has shown that He can trump death.

Vv. 5-7b

⁵ **Happy is he whose help is the God of Jacob,**
whose hope is in the LORD his God,

⁶ **who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them;**
who keeps faith forever;

⁷ **who executes justice for the oppressed;**
who gives food to the hungry.

(see Psalm 46:7; read Genesis 32:22-32)

Vv. 7c-9

The LORD sets the prisoners free;

⁸ **the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.**

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.

⁹ **The LORD watches over the sojourners** (resident aliens within Israel, who
were not hostile toward the Israelites),

he upholds the widow and the fatherless (the most deprived and desperate);
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

The descendants of Jacob, the children of Israel, had been rescued from slavery in Egypt and Exile in Babylon. There are countless Christians in Africa and Asia, who remain imprisoned for their faith, and who await release. We may also think of the various figurative prisons that keep us locked up and away from a full enjoyment of the new blessed life God gives. Jesus restored sight to the blind (see John 9:1-8), just as Isaiah had prophesied (Isaiah 35:5ff). In the new

creation (restoration) all physical disfigurement shall be reinstated to its original beauty. And here again we may also think of how God removes spiritual blindness by granting us ever deeper insight into His dealings with us. Those who are bowed down would include every sort of suppression, oppression, and depression.

V. 10

**¹⁰ The LORD will reign for ever,
thy God, O Zion, to all generations.**

Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD! -- because Easter reveals that the LORD is God the Father, God His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, and God the Spirit whom they jointly emit. This God alone is eternally reliable in His death-proof promises of life.

The Prayer from the LBW to accompany Psalm 146:

God of glory and power, happy indeed are those who have put their trust in you. Shine the brightness of your light upon us, that we may love you always with a pure heart and praise you forever; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Guide for Reflection:

There is an acknowledgement in this Psalm that we need help, and therefore we need some one whom we can trust and one who is at the same time powerful enough to offer the needed help. Friends, church leaders, even political leaders can give some kinds of assistance. But when the help we expect is not forthcoming, we feel let down. There are many people whom we can trust to some degree, but such friends, or relatives, or any others die, and their ability to provide support dies with them. And as that happens, and as we experience successive disappointments in leaders, and as we are bereft one by one of significant others, we begin to learn that the needs we have are of different, a higher order. They are needs that cannot be met by earthly authorities or by mere human beings, no matter how trustworthy they may be (verse 2). We need help from God.

But the Psalm speaks not of a God-in-general; it urges praise of Yahweh, the LORD, the God of Jacob. Genesis 32 shows Jacob as one who was determined to wrestle a blessing out of God, who would not take no for an answer, and who was content with the exchange of a permanent limp for a new name. He is now Israel, the one who has wrestled with God and men and has prevailed! To appeal to this

God for needed help is to face the prospect of a serious struggle, from which it would be easy to be discouraged. But the Psalmist, and we with him, deliberately appeal to the God of Jacob, for our striving with God will find its reward: a trustworthy and powerful source for the eternal help we need.

Moreover, the God of Jacob, far from being a local, tribal deity, is in fact the Creator of heaven and earth and the sea (verse 5). He is the God who has shown that He can be depended upon to keep faith by making good on His promises; He is the God of the victims of social injustice; He is the God who feeds the hungry. And His Name is Yahweh, who brought Israel out of the slavery of Egypt, and who may be depended upon to right every wrong and to remove every scar from the face of His creation (verses 6ff).

The righteous, whom Yahweh loves, may find joy in the LORD in such a prospect. Not so the wicked; God (to use the translation of the New English Bible in verse 8b) turns the course of the wicked to their ruin. The righteous are God's People. They are not a closed circle or a fixed number, but the People whose fellowship was expanded when we were placed among them in our baptism, and whose door is open to all, either to enter or -- may God forbid! -- to exit. The wicked are those who resist our invitation to join us and who actively resist all God's urgings. It is hazardous to make any future predictions about individuals. But with the Psalmist we may rejoice that the LORD Yahweh will reign forever. His reign stands in contrast to the impermanence of earthly, mortal rulers. Zion's God, Israel's God, will reign to all generations. May we and our children continue forever in righteousness under Him.

Walter E. Keller

May 2, 1999 – **The Fifth Sunday of Easter**