

GOD IS OUR HELP IN ALL TIMES

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church:

*YHWH causes to set prisoners free;
YHWH opens (the) eyes of blind men;
YHWH lifts up (those who are) bowed down;
YHWH loves righteous men;
YHWH watches over the sojourners...¹*

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

This is the annual Sunday that ends the time we remember growth and new life in the Church given through the Christ Who Epiphanied – appeared – in our flesh. The greens of paraments and vestments will be replaced this week with purple. That is given to remind us of both kingly attire and mourning.

Also, this is the last day in this place, for several weeks, in which we sing, chant and proclaim Hallelujah's in the orders of the Lord's Services. Wednesday will mark our Lenten fasting from those along with the Glorias. Fifty days from now, counting Sundays, God-willing, we will again rejoice with "Praise the Lord" chants as another Feast of the Resurrection begins.

So, it is fitting that the concluding "gesima" Sunday readings countdown opens with a Hallelujah Psalm. Today's Psalm begins and ends with, *all of you praise YH...* That sets a verbal frame that suits it well as it extolls the day's theme, which is: *God is our Help in all times!*²

You heard echoes of that theme in every reading of the day that followed the chanting of the 146th Psalm. Isaiah called you to remember that your *Elohim, He will come and save all of you*, through the Old Testament Reading.³ God's salvation is certainly a reflection of His help in all times. In the Gradual, the Psalm called you to recall that God, in His strength redeemed you, His people, from out of the godless nations. That is, God bought you back from the eternal end that is coming to all who reject Him and His Word.

¹ *Psalm 146:7-9a.*

² *Psalm 146:1a, 10c.*

³ *Isaiah 35:4b*

St. Paul, through a letter he originally was inspired to write to a divided congregation in Corinth, called out to you to remember that God's *sacrificial love... bears... believes... hopes... long-suffers all things* for those whom He knows to be His own.⁴ That certainly declares God's help in all times. In the Word of God given through the research of St. Luke, that which came out of his study of the eyewitness accounts of the Lord Who appeared in our flesh, we heard a narrative of Jesus' helping a man who cried out to Him for mercy.⁵ That proclaimed God's help in that time. That true story then moved those who saw the miracle of the Lord to fulfill the call of today's Psalm, which began as it ends, *all of you praise YH.*⁶

All of that help of God recorded in the day's readings moved your Church music planners to give you opportunities to respond in like manner. Through the music of the day, you heard calls to praise the God who *breaks the darkness... frees the pris'ners...turning blindness into sight...preached the Gospel...healing...calming...feeding....* You heard of the God *who blessed the children...who brings cool water...quenching thirst in every land.*⁷

Then you sang, in response, *Let us praise the Word Incarnate...of Jesus who suffered in our place...who died and rose victorious....* You continued your response to God who is your help in all times: *Let us sing for joy and gladness, seeing what our Lord has done....* Then you concluded in faithfulness: *Let us praise the true Redeemer, praise the One who makes us one.*⁸ You, we all, in that hymn, echoed the call of the Psalm of the Day! As you sang, did you reflect on the reality that you were fulfilling the Word of God?

Hear again the Psalm words that are given to lead us to give thanks that *God is our Help in all times.* Our ancient entrance Psalm began our day of praise with this call and response:

*All of you praise YH,
praise YHWH, O my soul.
I will praise YHWH as (long) as I am caused to be;*

⁴ *I Corinthians* 13:7.

⁵ *Luke* 18:38-43.

⁶ *Psalm* 146:1a, 10c.

⁷ Edwards, Rusty. "Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness," *Lutheran Service Book*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006, 849: 1-2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 849:3.

*I will sing praises to my God as I have my being.*⁹

Those words actually begin the ending of the Psalter. It is the first of the five ending Hallelujah Psalms (in the Hebrew, six in the Greek). As such, it appears to have been chanted or sung as part of the liturgy (public service) of the Second Temple period (circa 538 BC – AD 67/70). Then, it was part of the worship that was offered in non-High Feast times. That means, it also fits in well in our New Testament Temple post-Epiphany Feast time.

The 146th Psalm is annually chanted among us to conclude the season of joy over God's appearances in our flesh. It is with us as our recollections of His Epiphanies ends. The Psalm we are hearing about today is also heard in congregations like ours that follow the old pattern of readings in the other green season, specifically on Trinity XII and XV. When we consider the Church's public use of Psalm 146 with the other Psalms that conclude the books of the Psalms, their Hallelujahs show up in about 10 percent of the Church Year!

Today, those "All of you praise the Lord," calls are coupled with the reason all the faithful for all time, and most especially for you who live in this New Covenant era rejoice in praising the Lord. That was given in our Gospel reading. There the Evangelist records the actual words of Jesus, which are translated this way:

*Behold, we continue to go up into Jerusalem. Then will be completed all the things having been written concerning Him by the prophets, about the Son of Man. For He will be handed over to the Gentiles; and He will be mocked; and He will be treated seditiously; and He will be spat upon; then scourging (Him) they will kill Him; but by the third (day) He will resurrect.*¹⁰

Do you hear in that text how praising YHWH and the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus are tied together?

Some errant Christian worship, even in Lutheran congregations, is focused more upon that which we do than that which God is doing for us in His Services. Biblical

⁹ Psalm 146:1-2.

¹⁰ Luke 18:31-33.

Christian worship centers God's people upon receiving His gifts first. Then it moves us to means – hymns, prayers, and so on – such Divine Service treasures provide us opportunities to respond through the often paraphrase Word to His gifts.

That having been said, before the words we translate *Praise YH* were today, following the Feast of the Epiphany, five different Psalms began each Sunday. When we add the Epiphany Psalm to those, that leads us to note that today's Psalms concludes a week of Sunday Psalms for this Epiphany Season. From the Epiphany Psalm's declaration of the One who appeared to stand in God's Holy Place, to last week's proclamation that God's people receive comfort in the everlasting truth that God hears the prayers of those who trust in Him, the Holy Spirit has brought us again to listen as today's words of praise build from a corporate call to an individual confession of response to the gift of the Faith:

*All of you praise YH,
praise YHWH, O my soul.
I will praise YHWH as (long) as I live;
I will sing praises to my God as I have my being.¹¹*

Any person, singing, chanting, or saying those words would be rightly following the meaning of the Second Commandment. There, God will hear us as a congregation, and each of us as individuals, as we call upon Him in every time of need. In the recitation of the words that follow the call for all of you to praise YH, each of you are found faithful in offering the sacrifices of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. (Until now, have you ever thought of the reality that Dr. Luther's explanation to the Second Commandment actually reiterates the New Testament's teaching about the sacrifices of His Kingdom priests)?

That reflection of the Christian's priestly kingdom work leads into these lines:

*Put not your trust in princes,
in (a) son of Adam in whom (there) is no salvation.¹²
His breath departs,*

¹¹ *Psalm 146:1-2.*

¹² *Psalm 146:3.*

*he returns to his ground,
in that day his plans will perish.¹³*

First the Psalm moved us to chant God's praise. Next the Psalm declares why no one, not even God's highest creature – Adam and all his descendants – is worthy of praise that flows from complete trust. (There is a neat word play in the Hebrew of the Psalm at this point. That you may remind me to cover in today's Bible Study). Even the highest and mightiest of human princes – those for whom currencies are marked, cities and states named, libraries founded – not even the greatest of the sons of Adam, save One, have the power to save and establish eternal plans.

It was the Son of Man, the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth alone who died in the eternal plan to deliver Man from death. It was the Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God alone who completed God's plan of atonement on a cross. It was in Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man in One Person, in His resurrection from the dead, that God's plan to declare the faithful right with Himself was effected. He is One with the only God Who is worthy of such praise, as our Psalm sounds forth:

*Blessed (is he who has the) El of Jacob as his help,
whose hope (is placed) upon YHWH his El.
Who made heavens and earth,
the seas and all which (are) in them,
the One causing to keep faith forever.
Who does justice for oppressed ones,
Who gives bread to hungry men....¹⁴*

There again, we hear of Christ in the Psalms. The God of Jacob is the One True God. He is, as we chanted, the Creator God. He is, and we sang, the eternally Faithful One. He is the One doing justice – as the faithful die and rise to new life in Him in Holy Baptism. He is the One feeding the hungry – with the Bread of Life in His Holy Supper.

¹³ Psalm 146:4.

¹⁴ Psalm 146:5-7a.

This section of the Psalm speaks of Christ Jesus. He had the help of the God of Jacob, that is, the Father's help, as He raised Him from the dead to His glory. Even as He struggled with the ultimate sacrifice He would make for all sinners for all time, He continued to place His hope in the Father. It was into His hands He commended His Spirit. Jesus keeps the Faith forever. This He does to His Father, and for all who bear His Name. Here today, in the Psalm, you have reminders of His faithfulness. From that, today's Psalm of praise sounds on as it describes five gifts the Son of God and Son of Man, Jesus, continues to offer to sinners:

*YHWH causes to set prisoners free;¹⁵
YHWH opens (the) eyes of blind men;
YHWH lifts up (the) ones bowed down;
YHWH loves righteous men;¹⁶
YHWH watches over the sojourners;
(the) fatherless and widow, He upholds;
but (the) way of wicked men He brings to ruin.¹⁷*

In Jesus, all those gifts were given during throughout four decades of life that began in His incarnation in the womb of the blessed Virgin, and ended in His death as the last and greatest sacrifice for sin. Just this morning, we heard of Jesus enacting salvation from the darkness imposed by sin as He opened again the eyes of a blind man. He lifted up, through His Word, one bowed down by the impact of sin the world which had manifested itself in sightlessness. Jesus declared that man faithful – that is, right with God.

Even then, Jesus continued to watch over those who followed Him. He did so even as they sang praises to God without realizing Who Jesus is. All this He did as He prepared to enter into Jerusalem to be condemned, to die outside her walls, to be buried, and, by the third day, to be raised to life again. In His death He destroyed the ultimate wickedness men can do to each other. In His death, He bound the author of evil. In Jesus'

¹⁵ Psalm 146:7.

¹⁶ Psalm 146:8.

¹⁷ Psalm 146:9.

resurrection He became the first-born of the dead – that you who believe may someday live in glorified bodies with Him forever!

All that the Psalm declares is given to lead the faithful hearer and chanter of the Psalm to desire to give praise and thanks to God. That is what the Psalmist knew. It is what He was moved to record. Praise is what the ending Song of this season ends with, framing its words, in the manner in which it began:

*He will reign, YHWH, forever,
your Elohe, O Zion, for generation to generation, all of you praise YH.¹⁸*

The Lord who gives the fivefold gifts proclaimed by the Psalm reigns eternally as Victor over all the wicked. The Psalm ends as it began: *all of you praise YH!* In that call, it leads God's people to praise as the season that tells of God's Epiphany in the Flesh draws to its close. From generation to generation, God reigns over His Holy Zion, His eternal city in which His people dwell in His Presence. His praise in heaven is echoed on earth, and His Church continues to sing the threefold Holies and Hosannas as we await the passing of 50 days. Then, with all the heavenly hosts, accompanied by the entire Church that is faithful in following Jesus' entire Word on earth, we will again sing, "Hallelujah!"

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Quinquagesima (*Lutheran Service Book* one-year series)

Psalm 146; Isaiah 35:3-7; I Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 18:31-43

February 11, 2018

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria

¹⁸ Psalm 146:10.

All of you praise YH,
praise Him, O my soul, the YHWH.¹⁹

I will praise YHWH as I live,
I will sing praises to my God in my yet- being.²⁰

Put not your trust in princes,
in (a) son of Adam in whom is no salvation.²¹
His breath departs,
he returns to his ground,
in that day his plans will perish.²²

Blessed (is he who has the) El of Jacob as his help,
whose hope (is placed) upon YHWH his El.²³
Who made heavens and earth,
the seas and all which (are) in them,
the One causing to keep faith forever.²⁴
Who does justice for oppressed ones,
Who gives bread to hungry men.

YHWH causes to set prisoners free;²⁵

YHWH opens eyes of blind men;

YHWH lifts up ones bowed down;

YHWH loves righteous men;²⁶

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Fatherless and widow, He upholds,
but way of wicked men He brings to ruin.²⁷

YHWH will reign, forever,
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¹⁹ Psalm 146:1.

²⁰ Psalm 146:2.

²¹ Psalm 146:3.

²² Psalm 146:4.

²³ Psalm 146:5.

²⁴ Psalm 146:6.

²⁵ Psalm 146:7.

²⁶ Psalm 146:8.

²⁷ Psalm 146:9.