

**GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER**

Hear the Word of God for this Sunday in Lent but not of Lent:

*For into eternity (endures) His steadfast love.<sup>1</sup>*

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

This is the "I see" week in the Church Year. Today, we pray that you see that the Word is God's gift to you, not on account of merit or worthiness in you, but on account of His unconditional love for sinners. If you think back just a bit to the words of the first reading (proper) of the day, the entire 136<sup>th</sup> Psalm this year, you may recall the words of your chant, which were:

*His steadfast love endure forever.<sup>2</sup>*

As we recited that Psalm antiphonally, that is, back-and-forth from the sacrificial position at the Altar to the sacrificial position from the Nave, you were to be reminded of the God Who alone is worthy of all praise and thanks. Today was the first time, in this place, for a couple of decades at least, when we recited the entirety of the Psalm for this particular Sunday. In doing that, we followed a very ancient tradition of the Church of both the Old and New Covenants. You see, Psalm 136 has been known for centuries into millennia as "The Great Hallel!" that is, "The Great Praise God!" Did you recall having learned that when your eyes fell upon its words this morning?

In ancient Jewish, and before that, Israelite worship tradition, our Psalm for this day was the public Psalm variously recited on the last day of the Passover; the Psalm chanted on the mornings of Sabbaths and Feasts; and a Psalm of daily morning services. At times, *The Great Hallel* has been connected with the preceding Psalm. It has been a helpful tradition from ancient times, handed down from devout Jewish practice, that congregations that chant the 136<sup>th</sup> stand, as we did this morning.

In the New Covenant era, this Word from the Psalter has been tied to some of the most ancient Christian assemblages of readings. Both our day's texts from Ephesians and

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<sup>1</sup> *Psalm 136:1b, etc.*

<sup>2</sup> *Psalm 136:1b, etc. ESV.*

Luke were heard united for Sunday reading at this time of year before there was a season of Lent in the Church Year! Church History records that it was on such a Sunday as this, before the Feast of the Resurrection, that those readings would be heard by the catechumenate at their preliminary examination. They would have heard of the Lord's enduring love and mercy before they renounced the devil, all his works and ways. Then, over them was pronounced a formula of exorcism.<sup>3</sup> Suspended over all that heavy reality on account of sin, today's Psalm brought light and life.

Later, during the Reformation era, Psalm 136's 26 lines were held to have been used as a teaching text. At least one Reformer thought that the Psalm gave instruction to show how priests should sing and preach of God and His wonderful deeds.<sup>4</sup> By this decade of this century, the 136<sup>th</sup> Psalm was proclaimed, in a church body that is slowly catching up to some of the Reformation tenants, to be one:

*that sums up the entire history of salvation recorded in the Old Testament. It is a great hymn of praise that celebrates the Lord in the multiple, repeated expressions of his goodness through human history...<sup>5</sup>*

This day, I declare to you that our Psalm of Praise is one that is suitable for congregational and individual use whenever we realize God has delivered us – one or all – from any and all perils that come upon us on account of Adam's Fall. That means it is sufficient for every day. Still, good Church usage still keeps it out of public use on very penitential days. Why, then, do your pastors often give you such historical worship background to the day's texts?

First, because we love you and care that you know that the Word of God placed into your ears for any given day has been chosen with great deliberation for specific reasons: namely, to proclaim to you God's free gifts that come from Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of your sins. Second, we recognize that we are living in a time of the

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<sup>3</sup> Reed, Luther D. *The Lutheran Liturgy*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1947, 494.

<sup>4</sup> Luther, Martin. *Reading the Psalms with Luther*, Bruce A. Cameron, tr., St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007, 325.

<sup>5</sup> Internet, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20111019.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20111019.html). Benedict XVI. *The Great Hallel Psalm 136 (135)*, General Audience, St. Peter's Square, 19 October 2011, accessed March 2, 2018.

Church when two or more generations are hungering to learn that that which they are hearing has enduring foundations. They have begun to reject, in increasing numbers it appears, that which is new and innovative in the Church for that which has ancient roots. Third, we desire that you would treasure the Word and begin to guard it in your persons and in the Church. It is the power of God to withstand the assaults of the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh. When one, when you, stumble and fall in their attacks, words such as these are given to lift you up, to remind you of God's work of redemption for you, to help you see with eyes of the Faith Him Who died for you:

*For into eternity (endures) His steadfast love.<sup>6</sup>*

The eyes of the faithful most clearly behold God's enduring love in the death of Christ that frees them from their sins. Faithful eyes behold His love in His raising Him from the dead by the third day that the faithful might be declared right with God. You who have been given eyes of the Faith discern that, in terms of your salvation, believing is seeing. All of that may be summed up as coming from God's gifts to you out of the word pictured on the front of your bulletins, **חֶסֶד** [chesed]. Do you remember what that three-consonant Hebrew Word means?

The students at the Thursday evening Bible study at the Campus Christian Center learned its variegated meanings four years ago. One of its meanings you already chanted is, "steadfast love." The word may also be used to describe God's goodness, kindness, enduring love and loving-kindness in condescending to fulfill the needs of His creatures.

Some of you may recall that, **חֶסֶד** [chesed], holds similar meanings about God's attributes as the common Greek word many of you have come to know and cherish, **ἀγάπη** [agape]. As it is with that word for God's sacrificial, enduring, unconditional love, the little three-letter word, **חֶסֶד**[chesed], is so rich and full of meaning that it cannot be completely translated with a single English word or phrase.

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<sup>6</sup> *Psalm 136:1b, etc.*

Out of that we have learned, we declare that today's congregational refrain, "*His steadfast love endures forever,*" is fulfilled in Jesus for anyone who sees Him in the Word by faith.<sup>7</sup> That having been declared, what then does the seer of the Psalm, as well as the reader and the hearer of the Psalm, behold concerning the love of God in Christ Jesus that moves one to such a response 26 times? Let us begin to answer that as we hear the opening of the Psalm again:

*All of you cause to give thanks to YHWH, for good (He is)!*  
*All of you cause to give thanks to Elohe of the elohim!*  
*All of you cause to give thanks to Adonai of the Adonae!*<sup>8</sup>

Those lines represent the first natural division of the Psalm. They begin our separating it into the parts that describe, in sets, the reason for giving praise that God's mercy endures forever. The first three lines call for the faithful to give threefold thanks to God. The first thanks are offered to Him by the Name He gave to Moses at the burning bush. That is a four-letter Word we render YHWH. It is the Name of the Creator God, the One Who still causes all things to be and Who sustains them. The second thanks are offered to God, in the plural form, of all that may be called gods. The third thanks are offered to the Lord of Lords. All of these names are applied in Holy Scripture to the God of the Old Covenant as well as the God of the New Covenant (the same God). Such three-fold naming is also applied, in various New Testament texts, by Christ Jesus to Himself, as well as by other New Testament authors.

From that the Psalm moves into its second natural division. It leads the faithful into the remembrance of God's good creation. It ends with a reminder of God's parting the waters for the Israelites in the Exodus. In doing all that, it declares praise to the One Whose loving-kindness endures forever, that is:

*To Him doing great wonders, Him alone!*  
*To Him doing the heavens in understanding!*  
*To Him spreading out the Earth upon the waters!*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Psalm 136:1b, etc., ESV.

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 136:1-3.

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 136:4-6.

Those words open the hearers to behold the mercy of God in creating wonders that may be seen by the mortal eye. For the sake of His enduring love, He worked wonders. He made the heavens above and the earth beneath that His creatures, the highest of which is man, may have a home on the ground from which he was made and a roof of beauty over his head.

Next, Psalm moves on to declare the steadfast love of the Lord in terms of His good and glorious wonders that allow man to see in both day and night.

*To Him doing great lights!  
The sun for ruling in (the) day!  
The moon and stars for ruling in (the) night!<sup>10</sup>*

When the pressures of the world, the devil, and even your own sinful desires seem to drag you down, look up. Behold the wonders of the creation and see that you do have a loving God Who brings you light, day and night. When you may doubt God's forgiveness, confess your sins. Behold the lights of the heavens and the Light of Life wills to illumine you with His grace. Our Psalm moves on as we recall Him Whose enduring love lasts into eternity, as we give praise:

*To Him Who caused to smite Egypt in their first-born sons,  
and He caused to bring out Israel from away from them,  
In (a) strong Hand, and in (a) mighty Arm outstretched!  
To Him Who divided the Sea of Reeds (Red Sea) asunder,  
and caused to make Israel pass in (the) midst of it;  
but overthrew Pharaoh and his hosts in (the) Sea of Reeds!  
To Him Who caused lead His people in (the) wilderness!<sup>11</sup>*

God, in His steadfast love, redeemed His people through signs and wonders that led them out of the land which once oppressed them. Though they did not deserve it, in His mercy God delivered them. As you hear those words of the Psalm, you are free to remember that God wills to continue to deliver you from captivity to sin. As the ancients

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<sup>10</sup> Psalm 136:7-9.

<sup>11</sup> Psalm 136:10-16.

could hear the Word and look to the event of divine salvation through the waters of the Red Sea, you can hear the Word as you look to God's event of divine salvation for you through the waters of Holy Baptism.

Our Psalm moves on to proclaim biblical-historical accounts of God's loving-kindness and mercy. It reminds them, you, of His rescuing them from those who would prevent them from receiving and occupying the Promised Land. To all this, as the Church declares, "*for into eternity (endures) His steadfast love,*" as she sings of,

*The One Who caused to smite great kings;  
and slew famous kings!  
Sihon, King of the Amorites;  
Og, King of Bashan;  
and gave their land for (an) heritage,  
and gave their heritage to Israel His Servant,  
and rescued us from our enemies.<sup>12</sup>*

Without going into a Bible study concerning Sihon and Og, the Psalm reminded the faithful of the Old Covenant about God's defeat of those who would prevent His people from entering the Promised Land. They were those whose stood in the way of God delivering His promises to His people. Sihon and Og, in resisting God's people, strove against Him. He caused their defeat. Records of God's victories over those kings and His giving their kingdoms to His people as an inheritance are found in at least 43 Old Testament verses! (Before this, I had thought those two enemies of God and the Israelites had only been mentioned in one brief account)! Their long narratives have stood for thousands of years to remind God's people in Old and New Covenant eras of God's eternal steadfast love for those whom He chooses to bear His Name. They are reminders for you that God will prevent any and all enemies who rise up against you on your way to the eternal Promised Land.

This day's Psalm about the One whose steadfast love is eternal moves from those records of salvation history to its conclusion. After having declared God's wonders in the

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<sup>12</sup> Psalm 136:17-24.

heavens and earth; following that with declarations about God's redemptive act through water in the Old Covenant; having remembered God's overthrowing the enemies of His chosen people; with the echoes of God's rescue of the undeserving still ringing out, the morning Psalm declares His provisions for all His creatures.

The chant proclaims the *One giving bread to all flesh...*<sup>13</sup> That is what surely led to the Rabbis of old calling for this Psalm to be the one used in the morning, before the faithful broke the fast! It was to remind them, to call out to you at the beginning of each new day, that each day is to be a day in which you behold the steadfast love, enduring mercy, loving-kindness, and mercy of God in your hearing of His Word. With that the 136<sup>th</sup> Psalm concludes:

*All of you give thanks to El of the heavens,  
For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.*<sup>14</sup>

That you have done. That you will do as we prepare to receive the wonders the Great I Am, the God of gods, and Lord of Lords. Here, the Creator of heavens and earth, the great lights, will give that which sustains you in the bread that endures for forgiveness. Here, a physical enactment of the spiritual realities of the Psalm will be given, as *you all confess to the Lord of Lords that into the aeons (is) His mercy.*<sup>15</sup>

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

Lent III, *Oculi* (LSB One-year series)

Psalm 136; Jeremiah 26:1-15; Ephesians 5:1-9; Luke 11:14-28

March 5, 2018

*Pastor Michael A. Morehouse*

***Soli Deo Gloria***

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<sup>13</sup> *Psalm* 136:25a.

<sup>14</sup> *Psalm* 136:26

<sup>15</sup> *Psalm* 136:c LXX

*All of you cause to give thanks to YHWH, for good (He is)! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>16</sup>*

*All of you cause to give thanks to El of the Elohim! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>17</sup>*

*All of you cause to give thanks to Adonai of the Adonae! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>18</sup>*

*To Him doing great wonders, He alone! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>19</sup>*

*To Him doing the heavens in understanding! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>20</sup>*

*To Him Who spread out the Earth upon the waters! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>21</sup>*

*To Him doing great lights! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>22</sup>*

*The sun for ruling in (the) day! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>23</sup>*

*The moon and stars for ruling in (the) night! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>24</sup>*

*To Him Who caused to smite Egypt in their first-born sons! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>25</sup>*

*And He caused to bring out Israel from away from them! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>26</sup>*

*In (a) strong Hand, and in (a) mighty Arm outstretched! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>27</sup>*

*To Him Who divided the Sea of Reeds asunder! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>28</sup>*

*And caused to make pass Israel in (the) midst of it! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>29</sup>*

*But overthrew Pharaoh and his hosts in (the) Sea of Reeds! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>30</sup>*

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<sup>16</sup> Psalm 136:1.

<sup>17</sup> Psalm 136:2.

<sup>18</sup> Psalm 136:3.

<sup>19</sup> Psalm 136:4.

<sup>20</sup> Psalm 136:5.

<sup>21</sup> Psalm 136:6.

<sup>22</sup> Psalm 136:7.

<sup>23</sup> Psalm 136:8.

<sup>24</sup> Psalm 136:9.

<sup>25</sup> Psalm 136:10.

<sup>26</sup> Psalm 136:11.

<sup>27</sup> Psalm 136:12.

<sup>28</sup> Psalm 136:13.

<sup>29</sup> Psalm 136:14.

<sup>30</sup> Psalm 136:15.

*To Him Who caused to be leading His people in (the) wilderness! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>31</sup>*

*The One Who caused to smite great kings! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>32</sup>*

*And slew famous kings! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>33</sup>*

*Sihon, King of the Amorites, For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>34</sup>*

*Og, King of Bashan, For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>35</sup>*

*And gave their land for (an) heritage, For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>36</sup>*

*And gave their heritage to Israel His Servant, For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>37</sup>*

*Who in our low estate remembered us, For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>38</sup>*

*And rescued us from our enemies, For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>39</sup>*

*One giving bread to all flesh, For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>40</sup>*

*All of you give thanks to El of the heavens, For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.<sup>41</sup>*

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<sup>31</sup> *Psalm 136:16.*

<sup>32</sup> *Psalm 136:17.*

<sup>33</sup> *Psalm 136:18.*

<sup>34</sup> *Psalm 136:19.*

<sup>35</sup> *Psalm 136:20.*

<sup>36</sup> *Psalm 136:21.*

<sup>37</sup> *Psalm 136:22.*

<sup>38</sup> *Psalm 136:23.*

<sup>39</sup> *Psalm 136:24.*

<sup>40</sup> *Psalm 136:25.*

<sup>41</sup> *Psalm 136:26.*