

*8 The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. 9 The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made. 10 All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your faithful shall bless you. 11 They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, 12 to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. 13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds. 14 The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.*  
*Psalms 145:8-14*

This psalm would appear much more impressive and meaningful to us if we all knew Hebrew. Ready for your first lesson?

Psalms 145 is called an “acrostic psalm”. That means each line begins with the subsequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet: aleph, beth, gimel, dalet, he, vav, etc, which is 22 letters. (For a whopping acrostic psalm, look at 119. It has 22 stanzas; each stanza has 8 lines and each line of the stanza begins with same appropriate Hebrew letter. What poetic creativity!) As you might guess, this alphabetic arrangement can serve as a mnemonic device, helping the psalm’s reciter to remember what comes next. But today’s text from 145 shows there is even more going on. We are invited to consider the comprehensive sweep of God’s reign in the world.

Did you notice how many times the word “all” appears in just 7 verses? Ten times... that’s a lotta “all’s”!! They not only refer to God and God’s action in the world, but also to those who are the recipients of those actions.

Did you notice how many times the psalmist uses words of praise or speaking/telling of praise? In our verses for today, the confession of praise is done by “your (God’s) works” and “your (God’s) faithful.” In the last verse of the psalm, even critters get in on it: “all flesh” will bless God’s name forever and ever.”

Did you notice the familiar ring to the first verse of our text? “The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” It appears in other psalms and the prophets...and has made its way into our Sunday liturgy during Lent (Gospel acclamation). But the first time we see it in the Hebrew scriptures is in the Book of Exodus. These are the words God speaks about Godself to Moses right after the incident with the golden calf. While Moses was up on the mountain receiving the revelation of the Ten Commandments, the Israelites had melted down ‘all’ of their gold and shaped it into a calf for the people to worship, thus breaking #1 & #2. Despite that horrible betrayal of the Israelites toward the God who saved them from slavery in Egypt, God is still gracious, merciful and consistently loving. And not only to the people of Israel, but now in this psalm, “The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.”

Did you notice how the final verse in our devotion points out those whom the Lord specifically helps? “All who are falling” and “all who are bowed down.” Liberation theologians have coined the phrase “God’s preferential concern for the poor” to highlight the many verses in the Bible that reveal God’s compassion for the poor, sick, vulnerable, and outcast. The declaration made here is not an isolated instance or a singular expression of divine concern, but rather a culminating claim focused on the very nature of this Divine King. Such a claim is rooted in the character of God and characteristic of the nature of God’s reign.

But, what if we don’t know Hebrew and didn’t notice the psalm’s referential points of poetry, history and theology?

Then maybe we just reflect with awe and thanksgiving that we are part of the kingdom described by this psalm. A glorious, everlasting, and inclusive kingdom, whose ruler reigns with grace, mercy and love, especially for the poor – not because of who we are but because of who God is. Our role in the kingdom is to give thanks and praise to our loving God – and to witness to God’s power and glory.

We are reminded that all creation testifies to God’s goodness – getting in on that is the impressive and meaningful fun of kingdom life. That’s the best lesson.

Wishing you a kingdom kind of summer-

Pastor Laurie Miller

Christ Lutheran, Lorain and Redeemer Lutheran, Elyria