

Psalm 95

- 1. O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us heartily rejoice in the rock of our salvation.*
- 2. Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving and be glad in him with psalms.*
- 3. For the Lord is a great God and a great king above all gods.*
- 4. In his hand are the depths of the earth and the heights of the mountains are his also.*
- 5. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands have moulded the dry land.*
- 6. Come, let us worship and bow down and kneel before the Lord our Maker.*
- 7. For he is our God; we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.*
- 8. O that today you would listen to his voice: 'Harden not your hearts as at Meribah, on that day at Massah in the wilderness*
- 9. 'When your forebears tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my works.*
- 10. 'Forty years long I detested that generation and said, "This people are wayward in their hearts; they do not know my ways."*
- 11. So I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter into my rest."*

O come let us worship and bow down
and kneel before the Lord our Maker.

.

Psalm 95 is familiar to many of us as the Venite at Matins in the Book of Common Prayer. There it acts as a splendid call to worship. It was originally an invitation to participate in the enthronement festival and covenant renewal.

The first part (vv. 1-5) depicts the procession, with song and festal shout, approaching the temple, bearing the ark. The people hail God, who rules the divine beings of the heavenly council. This idea of God ruling the divine beings can also be seen in Psalm 82:

'God has taken his stand in the council of heaven;
in the midst of the gods he gives judgement.'
He is the creator and owner of the universe.

The second part (vv. 6-7) states the relationship between God and human beings, upon which worship is based. The congregation owes its existence to the creator God and must accept his authority.

Sheep survive because the shepherd leads them to pasture, and the congregation lives all the time by God's guidance.

'we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.'

The final part (vv.8-11) is a speech from God to the worshippers, describing the sin, which destroys the relationship between God and his people. Sin is disobedience. It is stubbornness (hardness of heart) and an attempt to force God into satisfying the wants of his people. The example of this is the incident in Exodus at Meribah and Massah, when the people rebelled against Moses and demanded water in the desert. Moses struck the rock, according to God's command, and the people received water, but not the greater blessing of entering Canaan (my rest). All died in the wilderness under God's wrath during the forty years of wandering.

This is an invitation to trust God first, rather than as a last resort. In good times we have a tendency to forget God, and turn to him when things go wrong. Sin is disobedience. If we go our own way, things go wrong. If pupils are disobedient in class, it leads to chaos, relationships break down and they don't learn. The unsatisfactory behaviour of one or a group of people affects everyone else. If we fail to observe the rules of the road when driving, we may cause an accident, which affects not only those in our car, but others as well.

If we trust God, we find peace and love, we learn to look after one another. This brings us to the Ten Commandments, which encourage us to put God first and to deal decently with one another.

Prayer

Almighty God and Father, help us to be still in your presence,
that we may know ourselves to be your people, and you to be our God;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

(James M. Todd)