

Psalm 71

1. *In you, O Lord, do I seek refuge; let me never be put to shame.*
2. *In your righteousness, deliver me and set me free;
incline your ear to me and save me.*
3. *Be for me a stronghold to which I may ever resort;
send out to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.*
4. *Deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of the evildoer and the oppressor.*
5. *For you are my hope, O Lord God, my confidence, even from my youth.*
6. *Upon you have I leaned from my birth,
when you drew me from my mother's womb;
my praise shall be always of you.*
7. *I have become a portent to many, but you are my refuge and my strength.*
8. *Let my mouth be full of your praise and your glory all the day long.*
9. *Do not cast me away in the time of old age;
forsake me not when my strength fails.*
10. *For my enemies are talking against me,
and those who lie in wait for my life take counsel together.*
11. *They say, 'God has forsaken him; pursue him and take him,
because there is none to deliver him.'*
12. *O God, be not far from me, come quickly to help me, O my God.*
13. *Let those who are against me be put to shame and disgrace;
let those who seek to do me evil be covered with scorn and reproach.*
14. *But as for me I will hope continually and will praise you more and more.*
15. *My mouth shall tell of your righteousness and salvation all the day long.
For I know no end of the telling.*
16. *I will begin with the mighty works of the Lord God;
I will recall your righteousness, yours alone.*
17. *O God, you have taught me since I was young,
and to this day I tell of your wonderful works.*
18. *Forsake me not, O God, when I am old and grey-headed,
till I make known your deeds to the next generation*

and your power to those all are to come.

19. *Your righteousness, O God, reaches to the heavens;
In the great things you have done, who is like you, O God?*
20. *What troubles and adversities you have shown me.
and yet you will turn and refresh me
and bring me from the deep of the earth again.*
21. *Increase my honour; turn again and comfort me.*
22. *Therefore I will praise you upon the harp for your faithfulness, O my God;
I will sing to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel.*
23. *My lips will sing out as I play to you,
and so will my soul, which you have redeemed.*
24. *My tongue also will tell of your righteousness all the day long,
For they shall be shamed and disgraced who sought to do me evil.*

Refrain

O Lord, you are my refuge and my strength,
let my mouth be full of your praise.

Psalm 71 is spoken by an old man, as can be seen in verse 9, 'Do not cast me way in the time of old age' and in verse 18, 'Forsake me not, O God, when I am old and grey-headed.'

The psalmist is hard pressed by the lying charges of enemies. (v.10 'For my enemies are talking against me, and those who lie in wait for my life take counsel together.')

He also expresses a sense of separation from God. (v.11, 'They say, "God has forsaken him; pursue him and take him, because there is none to deliver him,"')

The psalmist seeks sanctuary in the temple, and vindication from the God of justice. The temple is a refuge. (v.3, 'Be for me a stronghold to which I may ever resort.')

As an old man, he looks back over his life and knows that God has watched over his birth and supported him in his youth. (v.6, 'Upon you have I leaned since my birth, when you drew me from my mother's womb; my praise shall be always of you.')

God has educated him in the sacred traditions of the people of God. (v.17, 'O God, you have taught me since I was young, and to this day I tell of your wonderful works.')

The psalm contains many expressions of confidence, for example, v.5, 'For you are my hope, O Lord God, my confidence, even from my youth.'

So, he makes two vows, public testimony to God's saving deeds in the history of Israel and in his own experience. (vv.15,16 'My mouth shall tell of your righteousness and salvation all the day long, for I know no end of the telling. I will begin with the mighty works of the Lord God.')

There are also joyful songs of praise, especially at the end. (vv. 22,23, 'Therefore will I praise you upon the harp for your faithfulness, O my God; I will sing to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel. My lips will sing out as I play to you.')

When we become older, we look back over our lives; we enjoy reminiscing and thinking of good times. But we also hope that God will not leave us when we die, as expressed in this hymn:

Abide with me from morn till eve,
for without thee I cannot live;
abide with me when night is nigh,
for without thee I dare not die.

In Psalm 71, there is an assurance in v.20, 'What troubles and adversities you have shown me, and yet you will turn and refresh me and bring me from the deep of the earth again.'

Can we see, as we look back over our lives, examples of the presence and influence of God? Can we see ourselves as having been guided by God in decisions, which we have had to make? Have we a responsibility to teach the younger generations about the goodness and loving kindness of God? After all, in education, older people teach the young many subjects in languages, arts and science. So, the psalmist will teach the young about God. (v.18. 'Forsake me not, O God, when I am old and grey-headed, till I make known your deeds to the next generation and your power to all that are to come.')

So, Psalm 71 proclaims that older people have much to offer to the young, much experience of life to pass on; and there is at any age always the plea that God will never leave us. All the evidence, which we have, is that God will never let us down. Underlying Psalm 71 is that confidence, hope and joy.

Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God,
increase in us your gift of faith
that, forsaking what lies behind
and reaching out to that which is before,
we may run the way of your commandments
and win the crown of everlasting joy;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

(Collect for Trinity 18)