Psalm 107

*1. O give thanks to the Lord, for he is gracious,*

*for his steadfast love endures for ever.*

*2. Let the redeemed of the Lord say this,*

*those he redeemed from the hand of the enemy,*

*3. And gathered out of the lands from the east and from the west,*

*from the north and from the south.*

*4. Some went astray in desert wastes and found no path to a city to dwell in.*

*5. Hungry and thirsty, their soul was fainting within them.*

*6. So they cried to the Lord in their trouble and he delivered them from their distress.*

*7. He set their feet on the right way till they came to a city to dwell in.*

*8. Let them give thanks to the Lord for his goodness*

*and his wonders he does for his children.*

*9. For he satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry soul with good.*

*10. Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, bound fast in misery and iron,*

*11. For they had rebelled against the words of God*

*and despised the counsel of the Most High.*

*12. So he bowed down their heart with heaviness;*

*they stumbled and there was none to help them.*

*13. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,*

*and he delivered them from their distress.*

*14. He brought them out of darkness and out of the shadow of death,*

*and broke their bonds asunder.*

*15. Let them give thanks to the Lord for his goodness*

*and the wonders he does for his children.*

*16. For he has broken the doors of bronze*

*and breaks the bars of iron in pieces.*

*17. Some were foolish and took a rebellious way,*

*and were plagued because of their wrongdoing.*

*18. Their soul abhorred all manner of food and drew near to the gates of death.*

*19. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,*

*and he delivered them from their distress.*

*20. He sent forth his word and healed them, and saved them from destruction.*

*21. Let them give thanks to the Lord for his goodness*

*and the wonders he does for his children.*

*22. Let them offer him sacrifices of thanksgiving*

*and tell of his acts with shouts of joy.*

*23. Those who go down to the sea in ships and ply their trade in great waters,*

*24. These have seen the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep.*

*25. For at his word the stormy wind arose and lifted up the waves of the sea.*

*26. They were carried up to the heavens and down again to the deep;*

*their soul melted away in their peril.*

*27. They reeled and staggered like a drunkard and were at their wits’ end.*

*28. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,*

*and he brought them out of their distress.*

*29. He made the storm be still and the waves of the sea were calmed.*

*30. Then were they glad because they were at rest,*

*and he brought them to the haven they desired*

*31. Let them give thanks to the Lord for his goodness*

*and the wonders he does for his children.*

*32. Let them exalt him in the congregation of the people*

*and praise him in the council of the elders.*

*33. The Lord turns rivers into wilderness and water springs into thirsty ground;*

*34. A fruitful land he makes a salty waste,*

*because of the wickedness of those who dwell there.*

*35. He makes the wilderness a pool of water and water springs out of a thirsty land.*

*36. There he settles the hungry and they build a city to dwell in.*

*37. They sow fields and plant vineyards and bring in a fruitful harvest.*

*38. He blesses them, so that they multiply greatly;*

*he does not let their herds of cattle decrease.*

*39. He pours contempt on princes and makes them wander in trackless wastes.*

*40. They are diminished and brought low, through stress of misfortune and sorrow.*

*41. But he raises the poor from their misery*

*and multiplies their families like flocks of sheep.*

*42. The upright will see this and rejoice, but all wickedness will shut its mouth.*

*43. Whoever is wise will ponder these things*

*and consider the loving-kindness of the Lord.*

Refrain

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,

and his mercy endures for ever.

Psalm 107 is quite long, but I decided not to divide it into two parts, as it is better to treat it as a whole.

This psalm is a community thanksgiving (vv.1-32) followed by a hymn (vv.33-43). It is thought that v.3, ‘And gathered out of the lands from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south’, and the hymn, refer to the period after the exile and have been added to an earlier poem. The refrain, ‘So/Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble and he delivered them from/brought them out of their distress.’ which occurs in vv. 6, 13, 19 and 28, seems to support this. It is also borne out by the second refrain (in bold), ‘Let them give thanks to the Lord for his goodness and the wonders he does for his children.’ In vv. 9, 16, 22 and 32, interestingly, the second part of the refrain differs in each case.

The priests lead the congregation in calling on those, who have experienced God’s deliverance to bring their thank offering and to testify to God’s saving love. (vv.31,32, ‘Let them give thanks to the Lord for his goodness and the wonders he does for his children. Let them exalt him in the congregation of the people and praise him in the council of the elders.’)

The call to thanksgiving is addressed to:

Those on a journey, who have received guidance from God, vv. 4-9.

Prisoners, who have been released, vv. 10-16.

The sick, who have been healed, vv.17-22.

Those on the sea, who have been rescued from a storm, vv.23-32.

God’s sovereignty is stressed throughout all this.

Imprisonment and illness are seen as God’s punishment for sin. (v.11, ‘For they had rebelled against the word of God and despised the counsel of the Most High.’ And v.17, ‘Some were foolish and took a rebellious way, and were plagued because of their wrongdoing.’)

God raises the storm, which he later stills. (v. 25, ‘For at his word the stormy wind arose and lifted up the waves of the sea. And v. 29, He made the storm be still and the waves of the sea were calmed.’) We can think also of the stilling of the storm in the Gospels. There is also a reference to God’s victory over the ocean at the creation, as in Psalm 74, 12-14, ‘It was you that divided the sea by your might and shattered the heads of the dragons on the waters. You alone crushed the heads of Leviathan and gave him to the beasts of the desert for food. You cleft the rock for fountain and flood; you dried up ever-flowing rivers.’)

The hymn (vv,33-43) continues the stress on God’s sovereignty and here speaks of his lordship over the powers of fertility. (vv.33-38, ‘The Lord turns rivers into wilderness and water springs into thirsty ground. A fruitful land he makes a salty waste, because of the wickedness of those who dwell there. There he settles the hungry, and they build a city to dwell in. They sow fields and plant vineyards and bring in a fruitful harvest. He blesses them, so that they multiply greatly; he does not let their herds of cattle decrease.’)

God’s lordship over history is also stressed. (vv. 39-43). (v.39, ‘He pours contempt on princes and makes them wander in trackless wastes.’)

The psalm ends with a reminder that wise people should consider how God’s justice supports the needy and overthrows the powerful, because it is here that his

steadfast love is revealed. (v.43, ‘Whoever is wise will ponder these things and consider the loving-kindness of the Lord.’) This reminds us of the words of the Magnificat in Luke’s Gospel, of the song of Hannah in 1 Samuel and of Psalm 113, 6,7, ‘He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ashes, to set them with princes, with the princes of his people.’

Psalm 107 shows how God is close to us and involved with our everyday lives; he is seen as setting us on the right way, and bringing us back when we stray away or become lost. It also reminds us of our responsibility in standing up for justice, and it invites us to play our part in creating a world, in which people are valued and treated fairly and equally. The psalm also encourages us to give thanks to God for all that we have, for the world, in which we live, for loving relationships and for deliverance from problems; and most of all, for God himself and his constant presence.

‘O give thanks to the Lord, for he is gracious, for his steadfast love endures for ever.’

Prayer

Almighty God,

by whose grace we are accepted

and called to your service:

strengthen us by your Holy Spirit

and make us worthy of our calling;

through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with you,

in the unity of the Holt Spirit,

one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

(Collect, 5th. Sunday before Lent)