Psalm 147

*1. Alleluia.*

*How good it is to make music for our God, how joyful to honour him with praise.*

*2. The Lord builds up Jerusalem and gathers together the outcasts of Israel.*

*3. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up all their wounds.*

*4. He counts the number of the stars and calls them all by their names.*

*5. Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his wisdom is beyond all telling.*

*6. The Lord lifts up the poor, but casts down the wicked to the ground.*

*7. Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make music to our God upon the lyre;*

*8. Who covers the heavens with clouds and prepares rain for the earth;*

*9. Who makes grass to grow upon the mountains*

*and green pants to serve our needs.*

*10. He gives the beasts their food and the young ravens when they cry.*

*11. He takes no pleasure in the power of a horse, no delight in human strength;*

*12. But the Lord delights in those who fear him,*

*who put their trust in his steadfast love.*

*13. Sing praise to the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion;*

*14. For he has strengthened the bars of your gates*

*and has blest your children within you.*

*15. He has established peace in your borders and satisfies you with the finest wheat.*

*16. He sends forth his command to the earth and his word runs very swiftly.*

*17. he gives snow like wool and scatters the hoarfrost like ashes.*

*18. He casts down his hailstones like morsels of bread; who can endure his frost?*

*19. He sends forth his word and melts them;*

*he blows with his wind and the waters flow.*

*20. He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and judgements to Israel.*

*21. He has not dealt so with any other nation; they do not know his laws.*

*Alleluia.*

Refrain

Sing praise to the Lord, O Jerusalem:

praise your God, O Zion.

Psalm 147 is one of the Alleluia psalms (Psalms 146-150). These psalms are called Alleluia psalms, because they begin and end with this one-word call to praise, Alleluia.

The psalm is in three sections, vv.1-6, 7-11 and 12-21. It is about God’s dealing with his world.

In the first part, God is seen as gathering the outcasts (v.2), that is the exiles and caring for those, who are sad and weak. He counts the innumerable stars and calls them by their names. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus says, ‘But even the hairs of your head are all counted.’

God is infinite in wisdom towards the world and also infinite in compassion towards the weakest inhabitants. (v.3, ‘He heals the brokenhearted and binds up all their wounds.’ and v.6, ‘The Lord lifts up the poor but casts down the wicked to the ground.’)

The second part deals with the natural world. By his power, God summons the rain

to bring fertility to the soil (v.9, ‘Who makes grass to grow upon the mountains and green plants to serve our needs.’) and food to the animals. (v.10,’He gives the beasts their food and the young ravens when they cry.’) However, God does not delight in human or animal power. (v.11, ‘He takes no pleasure in the strength of a horse, no delight in human strength.’) What matters is the devotion of people who trust in God’s steadfast love. (v.12, ‘But the Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their trust in his steadfast love,’)

In v. 7, there is a reference to the lyre, which was a sort of harp, thought to be quadrilateral in shape with strings stretched over a bridge on a soundbox to a crosspiece at the other end. It may have had ten strings, and it was played with a pick. In 1 Samuel, 16, v.23, David played the lyre with his hand. (‘And whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand.’)

The third section refers to God’s power, as seen in the weather. God has taken up residence in Zion, which is now a centre of blessing and strength. (vv.13,14, ‘Sing praises to the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion; for he has strengthened the bars of your gates and blest your children within you.’)

His word is all-powerful, so when he speaks, the snow, the hail, the frost and cold come over the land (vv.17,18), and then, at his command, the warm wind releases the waters. (v.16, ‘He sends his command to the earth and his word runs very swiftly.’ and v.19, ‘He sends forth his word and melts them; he blows with his wind and the waters flow.’) God’s word was given to Israel in the covenant. (vv. 20, 21, ‘He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and judgements to Israel. He has not dealt so with any other nation; they do not know his laws.’)

The psalm ends as it began with Alleluia.

Psalm 147, like Psalm 104, reveals God’s care for all creation. We are aware of the majesty of nature, the sea and the mountains, which are things of wonder, before which, as human beings, we can feel very small and powerless. This is expressed by Lord Byron in Childe Harold:

‘Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean – roll!

Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;

Man marks the earth with ruin – his control

Stops with the shore.

Israel is seen as having a special role, as God’s word was given to them in the covenant. So, they are to be ‘a light to the nations’, expressed in the Nunc Dimittis:

‘Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace: your word has been fulfilled.

My own eyes have seen the salvation: which you have prepared in the sight of every people; a light to reveal you to the nations: and the glory of your people Israel.’

We also need to be aware of God’s presence in our world, in creation and in the relationships between people. We live in a world with many problems, conflict, broken relationships, natural disasters, crime, disease. However, God is always present, his love never fails, and therefore we are able to follow this psalm’s praise and joy for God’s care for us and for his creation and try to play our part in revealing his light in our world.

Prayer

Almighty God,

we praise you for all your wonderful works,

for the beauty and bounty of the world around us,

for everything you have given us so richly to enjoy.

We bless you for our own creation

as men and women made in your own image,

with minds to know you,

hearts to love you,

and wills to obey you.

Accept, O God, this our praise and thanksgiving,

and to your name be honour and glory for evermore.

Amen.

(Frank Colquhoun)

As a thanksgiving for these marvellous psalms, we can use Psalm 150.

1. Alleluia.

O praise God in his holiness;

praise him in the firmament of his power.

2. Praise him for his mighty acts;

praise him according to his excellent greatness.

3. Praise him with the blast of the trumpet;

praise him upon the harp and lyre.

4. Praise him with timbrel and dances;

praise him upon the strings and pipe.

5. Praise him with ringing cymbals;

praise him upon the clashing cymbals.

6. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Alleluia.

Blessing

God the Holy Trinity make you strong in faith and love,

defend you on every side, and guide you in truth and peace;

and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the

Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.

Amen.

Acknowledgements:

The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible

Reflections on the Psalms (Church House Publishing)

Contemporary Parish Prayers - Frank Colquhoun

New Parish Prayers - Frank Colquhoun

Enriching the Christian Year - Michael Perham (SPCK)

New Every Morning – BBC