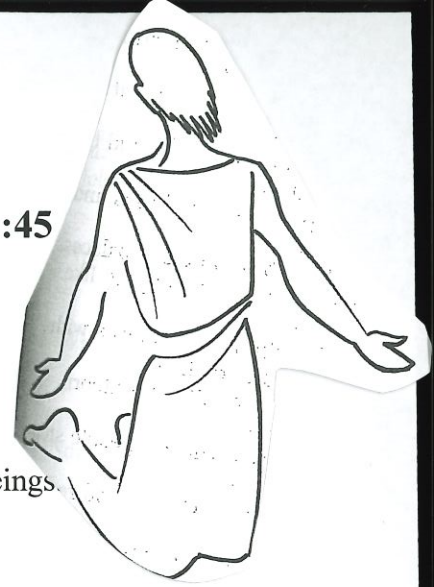


## Session Four: Tuesday, October 17: 10:30 until 11:45



- <sup>TNK</sup> **Psalm 96:1** Sing to the LORD a new song, sing to the LORD, all the earth.
- <sup>2</sup> Sing to the LORD, bless His name, proclaim His victory day after day.
- <sup>3</sup> Tell of His glory among the nations, His wondrous deeds, among all peoples.
- <sup>4</sup> For the LORD is great and much acclaimed, He is held in awe by all divine beings.
- <sup>5</sup> All the gods of the peoples are mere idols, but the LORD made the heavens.
- <sup>6</sup> Glory and majesty are before Him; strength and splendor are in His temple.
- <sup>7</sup> Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
- <sup>8</sup> Ascribe to the LORD the glory of His name, bring tribute and enter His courts.
- <sup>9</sup> Bow down to the LORD majestic in holiness; tremble in His presence, all the earth!
- <sup>10</sup> Declare among the nations, "The LORD is king!" the world stands firm; it cannot be shaken; He judges the peoples with equity.
- <sup>11</sup> Let the heavens rejoice and the earth exult; let the sea and all within it thunder,
- <sup>12</sup> the fields and everything in them exult; then shall all the trees of the forest shout for joy
- <sup>13</sup> at the presence of the LORD, for He is coming, for He is coming to rule the earth; He will rule the world justly, and its peoples in faithfulness.

**Plan:** Reaching for our **tools:** *We can readily see that this Psalm's strategy* is to maximize praise of God; our deeper **questions** can be who is invited to offer praise, why so, when, where, how? What's in it for us, for other creatures, for God? This is a good place to look at "generation gaps": what the pre-modern psalmists thought they were doing when they praised the Creator may not be the same as we moderns think ("moderns" are post-scientific revolution thinkers) suppose, and surely not what post-moderns think (I am calling "post-modern" the inhabitants of New Cosmology). Does it work for all of those to praise God—how so? Three more tools can help us: Suppose we count on living **from within the still-unfolding universe**, as distinct from a world that is pretty much set (as the Psalmist's world can seem)? As God energizes all that is, it all continues to emerge. This psalm offers a place to introduce the concept of holonization, which invites us (insofar as we can **disable/disprivilege certain categories** from classical philosophy and theology) to consider all the collaborating units whose being adds to praise of God, insight into God. If classic philosophy/theology tends to rank beings and to privilege the human, the concept of holons invites us to imagine, examine the various players and their various roles in praising all that exists. We are challenged to **recalculate the negative bias**

**against the physical** that often underlies Scripture. And, please be ready to offer your own **questions** and insights about the **Sunday lectionary arrangement**.

<sup>TNK</sup> **Psalm 18:1** For the leader. Of David, the servant of the LORD, who addressed the words of this song to the LORD after the LORD had saved him from the hands of all his enemies and from the clutches of Saul.

<sup>2</sup> He said: I adore you, O LORD, my strength,

<sup>3</sup> O LORD, my crag, my fortress, my rescuer, my God, my rock in whom I seek refuge, my shield, my mighty champion, my haven.

<sup>4</sup> All praise! I called on the LORD and was delivered from my enemies.

<sup>5</sup> Ropes of Death encompassed me; torrents of Belial terrified me;

<sup>6</sup> ropes of Sheol encircled me; snares of Death confronted me.

<sup>7</sup> In my distress I called on the LORD, cried out to my God; in His temple He heard my voice; my cry to Him reached His ears.

<sup>8</sup> Then the earth rocked and quaked; the foundations of the mountains shook, rocked by His indignation;

<sup>9</sup> smoke went up from His nostrils, from His mouth came devouring fire; live coals blazed forth from Him.

<sup>10</sup> He bent the sky and came down, thick cloud beneath His feet.

<sup>11</sup> He mounted a cherub and flew, gliding on the wings of the wind.

<sup>12</sup> He made darkness His screen; dark thunderheads, dense clouds of the sky were His pavilion round about Him.

<sup>13</sup> Out of the brilliance before Him, hail and fiery coals pierced His clouds.

<sup>14</sup> Then the LORD thundered from heaven, the Most High gave forth His voice -- hail and fiery coals.

<sup>15</sup> He let fly His shafts and scattered them; He discharged lightning and routed them.

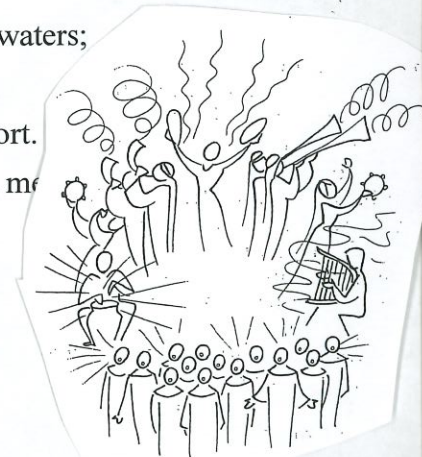
<sup>16</sup> The ocean bed was exposed; the foundations of the world were laid bare by Your mighty roaring, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of Your nostrils.

<sup>17</sup> He reached down from on high, He took me; He drew me out of the mighty waters;

<sup>18</sup> He saved me from my fierce enemy, from foes too strong for me.

<sup>19</sup> They confronted me on the day of my calamity, but the LORD was my support.

<sup>20</sup> He brought me out to freedom; He rescued me because He was pleased with me.

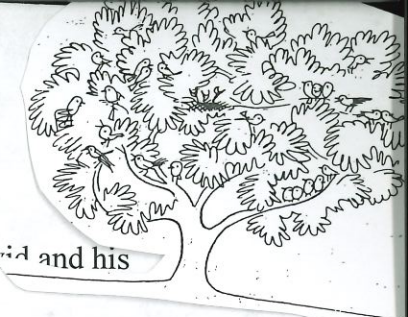


<sup>21</sup> The LORD rewarded me according to my merit; He requited the cleanness of my hands;  
<sup>22</sup> for I have kept to the ways of the LORD, and have not been guilty before my God;  
<sup>23</sup> for I am mindful of all His rules; I have not disregarded His laws.  
<sup>24</sup> I have been blameless toward Him, and have guarded myself against sinning;  
<sup>25</sup> and the LORD has requited me according to my merit, the cleanness of my hands in His sight.  
<sup>26</sup> With the loyal, You deal loyally; with the blameless man, blamelessly.  
<sup>27</sup> With the pure, You act purely, and with the perverse, You are wily.  
<sup>28</sup> It is You who deliver lowly folk, but haughty eyes You humble.  
<sup>29</sup> It is You who light my lamp; the LORD, my God, lights up my darkness.  
<sup>30</sup> With You, I can rush a barrier; with my God I can scale a wall;  
<sup>31</sup> the way of God is perfect; the word of the LORD is pure; He is a shield to all who seek refuge  
in Him.  
<sup>32</sup> Truly, who is a god except the LORD, who is a rock but our God? --  
<sup>33</sup> the God who girded me with might, who made my way perfect;  
<sup>34</sup> who made my legs like a deer's, and let me stand firm on the heights;  
<sup>35</sup> who trained my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze.  
<sup>36</sup> You have given me the shield of Your protection; Your right hand has sustained me, Your  
care has made me great.  
<sup>37</sup> You have let me stride on freely; my feet have not slipped.  
<sup>38</sup> I pursued my enemies and overtook them; I did not turn back till I destroyed them.  
<sup>39</sup> I struck them down, and they could rise no more; they lay fallen at my feet.  
<sup>40</sup> You have girded me with strength for battle, brought my adversaries low before me,  
<sup>41</sup> made my enemies turn tail before me; I wiped out my foes.  
<sup>42</sup> They cried out, but there was none to deliver; *cried* to the LORD, but He did not answer them.  
<sup>43</sup> I ground them fine as windswept dust; I trod them flat as dirt of the streets.  
<sup>44</sup> You have rescued me from the strife of people; You have set me at the head of nations;  
peoples I knew not must serve me.  
<sup>45</sup> At the mere report of me they are submissive; foreign peoples cower before me;  
<sup>46</sup> foreign peoples lose courage, and come trembling out of their strongholds.  
<sup>47</sup> The LORD lives! Blessed is my rock! Exalted be God, my deliverer,  
<sup>48</sup> the God who has vindicated me and made peoples subject to me,  
<sup>49</sup> who rescued me from my enemies, who raised me clear of my adversaries, saved me from  
lawless men.



<sup>50</sup> For this I sing Your praise among the nations, LORD, and hymn Your name:

<sup>51</sup> He accords great victories to His king, keeps faith with His anointed, with David and his offspring forever.



**Plan:** As I did once before, let me “upload” what I wrote about this Psalm in another connection and then go from there:

This psalm, attributed to David as are so many, is reproduced generally and slightly more calmly in the narrative of David’s life (roughly in 1-2 Samuel) and much more closely [nearly *verbatim*] in 2 Samuel 22). There it has a rough narrative setting, though in material that most scholars consider to be an appendix to other material about David. The psalms almost certainly lived complex lives before being bundled into their present canonical position in a stable book, and that we have a twin for this prayer reminds us of all we do not know about the Bible! But we have enough to live and norm by.

A first step in this long (51 verses) poem is to block out the main progression, using our **floorplan** tool. The first four verses comprise an appeal to God, a confident call to one who has been reliable before. The **general literary images** include pugnacious *metaphors*: God as rock, shelter, stronghold, champion and defender. The speaker does not exhibit lack of confidence as he cries out for help. He moves on, next (vv. 5-7), to a description of the problem that occasioned the appeal: an encounter with death, expressed in a welter of images: strong watery currents and tides, the approach of the underworld (Sheol), death’s clammy hand. And, the speaker’s cry is met as it is answered: no sooner uttered than heard. We may envision some of our other psalm-speakers shaking their heads in envy or even disbelief at the speed of the divine response reported here. However many or few psalms we have inhabited, we know that God’s apparent silence is often experienced by those who call. Not so here! One of our tools is **expect exaggeration**, and we may yoke it with **read for depth without assuming literalism** as we take in these words. The ascription to David, whose long narrative life is full of all sorts of estrangement from God, may also tug at our sleeve for some attention. Many wonder that David, with his dubious record, is such a favorite.

And, next pours out a long (vv. 8-17) description of how God intervened to save the speaker. The warrior deity, beloved by at least some of the ancients, comes to the rescue with cosmic garb and weapons to assist. These tropes are responsive to our tool **Israel and its deity have a complex and insider/outsider identity**; that is, the culture that we call Hebrew Bible or Old Testament and the DNA of the biblical deity Christians call the father of Jesus is ancient Northwest

Semitic (Canaanite) and something else (mysteriously “come in from the East”). The cosmic warrior is not the favorite of all psalm-prayer-ers, but it was—remains—popular with many at times of crisis. The psalm does not use the specific image of God as paramedic-team but might have done so, reminding us the difference between making an appointment to see a physician in his or her office and calling 911. This psalm has called 911.

The next big chunk of verses (18-32) accounts for the intensity of the divine responder, pushing into language territory that may sound entitled. The speaker says I deserved this, and again, modern readers are often loath to slide along with such a point of view. Those recalling the details of the life of David and ascribing him as speaker here feel that he, as well, need not pile up his achievements with such lack of compunction. Again, insofar as we struggle to understand the prayer without judging it too harshly, we may recall that God’s reputation for justice was considered at risk. Defeats of God’s people were likely taken as defeats of Godself, and so some push-back was considered important. In the zero-sum game that *help from anthropology and sociology* remind us to consider, some tangible evidence of divine power and favor were important. God helps God’s own, to the detriment of others. The language and form of apocalyptic (Daniel 7-12 and Revelation *passim*) trade in these rather baroque ways of talking about the links between a just God in heaven and the suffering of the innocent humans on earth. In such texts, there is little confusion or ambiguity between good and evil; they are clearly marked, and mistaken choices are culpable. This may be a place to recall that *stories are told slant without losing their value*. That is, we appreciate the speaker’s confidence without necessarily accepting this experience as literally true. David had some narrow escapes, but not quite like this one.

The long psalm winds toward its conclusion (vv. 33-51) as the speaker assists the deity. Again, it is a bit over the top for many, excessively eager to take great satisfaction in the defeat of the threatening others. As I am inclined to dismiss this prayer with a “not so fast” reminder, thinking of so many people—often not with David’s well-worn relationship with God—who in a moment of crisis pray for this God to help them. When a child is ill, or a parent, or when some sort of catastrophe suddenly looms, we may know that some people call desperately if guiltily for help from God. When that help is not forthcoming, as typically God does not “intervene” to rescue our loved ones, people are disappointed and angry, feel somehow short-changed. I am not proud to admit that I sometimes feel impatient with such anger and resentment—“How could God not save my daughter?!”—and want to rejoin: “That’s not how God is, what God does. Look around! Daughters die. It’s the way of all flesh. God is *not* a paramedic.” Again, though, other voices in the psalms help me to a response more salutary, reminding me that most of the petitioners in the psalms betray little sense of being entitled. When people are desperate, they reach for extreme

measures, and so we have here. There are plenty of other psalms to help me respond with more compassion.

All that being said: If this Psalm is going to be used in liturgy, snippeting is inevitable! The issue I probably have with snippeting is that a very small percentage of the OT is used in liturgy; we could do better! Moving on from that: A **theology/spirituality question**: What do we, do you, expect God to do for us, with us? If not this sort of rescue, then what? Does this Psalm help us with that, or maybe even the opposite (not help much)? And, please be ready to offer your own **questions** and insights about the **Sunday lectionary arrangement**.

