

PSALM 111

¹ Praise the LORD!

I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

² Great are the works of the LORD,
studied by all who delight in them.

³ Full of honour and majesty is God's work,
and God's righteousness endures for ever...

⁴ The LORD is gracious and merciful.

⁵ God provides food for those who fear God;
ever mindful of God's covenant.

⁶ The Holy One has shown the people the power of divine works,
in giving them their inheritance among the nations.

⁷ The works of God's hands are faithful and just;
all God's precepts are trustworthy.

⁸ They are established for ever and ever,
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.

⁹ God sent redemption to God's people...
Holy and awesome is God's name.

¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practise it have a good understanding.
God's praise endures for ever.

It's thanksgiving weekend. And even as we know we should be thankful ever and always, it's not always easy, is it? Some of us have difficult things we're facing or things we have faced that we are carrying heavily and deeply. Despite this, or perhaps in the very face of this, one strategy is to take a moment or some time, intentionally so, to ponder something for which we are thankful. No matter who we are or what we've been through, there is always something to be thankful for. It can be as simple as waking up this day and being alive. What can we do for ourselves or someone else (a human or some other living thing) because we are alive this day? What has God made possible for us for all the impossibilities that may preoccupy us much of the time?

Psalm 111 is another one of those praise and thanksgiving psalms. There are many of them. But no one of them is exactly the same. There are infinite ways to say thank you, sing thank you and feel thank you. The psalmist names the "works of the Lord" as a reason to be thankful. What works are those? The biblical book of Exodus tells the core story of the people as they power their way out of slavery into freedom, working through their wounds and traumas along the way. The psalm refers to: "God providing food for those who fear God" (v.5) as God did for the people in their wilderness hunger and

desperation. There is also giving the people “their inheritance among the nations” (v.6) which gave those who were homeless a place to call home. “God sent redemption to God’s people” (v.9) through leaders like Moses, Aaron and Miriam, and many others unnamed. They worked through their fears and doubts to risk it all because freedom was better than enslavement even though enslavement could sometimes feel safer, being an attachment in one’s life for so long.

And so, if we follow through on praise and thanksgiving as an intentional practice this weekend, and if we follow the reasons provided in this psalm, perhaps we need to think about praise and thanksgiving as a practice of freedom. To claim our freedom we must be liberated from that which oppresses us. And that which oppresses us we can’t just change or be rid of with a snap of our fingers. Rather, it’s about how we internally embrace praise and thanksgiving despite what we cannot so easily change. By positioning ourselves internally through praise and thanksgiving we may see a way through to some kind of fullness and peace we will never see if we just stick with an enslavement mentality, burnt out, resentful or hopeless.

May God liberate you as God liberated the first peoples of our biblical faith. And may such liberation be inspired and evoked through the practice of praise and thanksgiving.

PRAYER: come to us, O God... Come to us afresh... May we feel you the way we feel a gentle breeze when it blows across our face... May we feel you within us as a warmth running through our bodies... ease the stress and the tension... show us a light to light our way through... assure us that things can open up even as they may feel closed right now... awaken us to possibilities... ease us into acceptance with a fresh feeling of peace... Make freedom mean something more to us at this time of our lives... In Jesus’ name; Amen.