

Psalm 105: 1-2

¹ O give thanks to the LORD, call on God's name,
make known God's deeds among the peoples.

² Sing to the Lord, sing praises to God;
tell of all God's wonderful works.

This psalm goes on for another 45 verses, telling of God's "wonderful works". It tells the story of the patriarchs and matriarchs (Abraham and Sarah and their generations) all the way until the family ends up in Egypt, how they are enslaved, and then their incredible journey to freedom all the way to the promised land (This rehearses the story in the first two books of the bible: Genesis and Exodus).

And what is the purpose of this storytelling? To give thanks and praise to God for God's wonderful deeds and works in providing for the people, sustaining them and delivering them from every trial and tribulation. Because God did this for the people before, now that they are in exile, God will also provide, sustain and deliver them and they will have fresh reasons to thank and praise God for God's wonderful deeds and works.

Now, how does this apply to us here and now? Well, there are at least two ways to read the story Psalm 105 tells. And these two ways are reflected in a popular saying that goes like this: "Give a person a fish and you feed them for a day. Teach a person to fish and you feed them for a lifetime." The traditional reading of the story of God's people sees the people as helpless before great colonial powers and empires (Enslaved in Egypt, and enslaved again in exile in Babylon). Only God can save them and God does so through miraculous wonders and miracles. They are like helpless children saved by a parent stronger than any foe. A more progressive reading of the story, however, sees how people who are fewer in number, beaten down and enslaved, are empowered to rise up, break free and seek to build a life and a society where no one needs to be afraid or enslaved again.

The key theme of this psalm, then, is how God's "deeds" and "works" of such empowerment take root and grow within the people? How do they build their sense of confidence? How do they heal from traumatic wounds of abuse and grief at their losses without becoming obsessed with vengeance or caving in to despair? How do they learn again to build relationships of trust and love rather than constantly looking over their shoulders and mistrusting their neighbours rather than building collaborative relationships with them? How do they learn to fish through God's empowerment of them rather than remain helpless victims desperate for circumstances to provide fish or they die?

And for us, the larger questions are also these: Where do we look for God in our lives? Do we look to God to keep rescuing us by giving us fish? Are we in the mindset where every good happening in our lives we attribute to God's intervention while every unfortunate happening and illness we experience as either God's absence or indifference or punishment? Or are we learning how to fish because we are drawing prayerfully on God's inner empowerment of us? Is God the source of faith, hope and love growing in us to sustain and guide us or do we expect God to pull the strings in our world so that every circumstance external to us serves our blessing and protection?

PRAYER: We give thanks to you, O God, and we sing your praises. You are ever above us, beside us and within us, seeking to empower us at every stage of our journey. We struggle with doubt sometimes, yes. We struggle with resentment, bitterness and questioning. We lose hope. It's hard to keep loving when people turn on us, betray us or dismiss us. We lose faith when our circumstances diminish us. Show us new ways and open new doors in how to live and love and thrive regardless of whether there is sunshine or rain. You can do all things. Empower us to rise up through your strengthening within...

Amen.