

Psalm 147 For Every Day

Hallelujah! How good it is to sing praises to our God! How pleasant it is to honour God with praise!

--Psalm 147:1

Psalm 147:1-11 is appointed in the revised lectionary (Evangelical Lutheran Worship) for worship on the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany and for daily prayer for part of the week leading to the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany. (The other half of Psalm 147 is appointed for the Second Sunday after Christmas.) In the days when Christians said grace after meals as well as before (refer to the Small Catechism, "Table Blessings," ELW p. 1167), Psalm 147:11 was a feature of daily life:

"God is pleased with those who fear the Lord; with those who await God's steadfast love."

With our lives so disoriented by the pandemic, our time together around meals is even more precious. Pausing to give thanks before we disperse from the table would be a good way to acknowledge the gift of togetherness just received from God and to ask God to enable us to share that gift again.

Walter Brueggemann places Psalm 147 among the "Psalms of New Orientation" (*The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (1984): p. 123ff), "The Psalms give expression to that new reality of disorientation, when everything in heaven and on earth seems skewed...But the move into disorientation is not the only move made in the faith of Israel... the Psalms regularly bear witness to the surprising gift of new life just when none had been expected." This new orientation is never a return to what was, "Rather, the speaker and the community of faith are often surprised by grace...the newness cannot be explained, predicted, or programmed..." but is "wrought by the power and goodness of God." Therefore, we do what we do best: tell the story, recite the events, testify in wonder and gratitude. Psalm 147 expresses such wonder and gratitude for such a miraculous gift—and not just once, but so often that we confidently trust that this is who God is and what God does for us. Gripped as we are in the uncertainties and struggles of the pandemic, this new orientation of faith instead of anxiety is good news!

St. Jerome was one of the first to undertake a comprehensive translation of the Bible into the common spoken language. To translate the Old Testament, he moved to Bethlehem to learn Hebrew. In a homily on Psalm 146, Jerome explained, "Along with other names for God in the Hebrew language, there is also the name Ja, the meaning of which is 'invisible.' As the Hebrew word for our word praise is 'allelu,' the Hebrew psalm has 'allelu Ja.'" He then pointed to the invisible part of singing and praying Psalm 147: "it is a good thing to sing a sacred song, to sing, not with the voice, mind you, but with the heart" (*Grace for Grace: The Psalter and the Holy Fathers*, (1992): p. 613). One of the many gifts of contemporary worship is the emphasis on heart-felt praise making visible the presence of the invisible God. Jerome would say a heart-felt "Amen!"

Writing on Psalm 147, Augustine made the connection between praising God and living for God: "Will you then sing a psalm? Let not your voice alone sound the praises of God, but let your works also be in harmony with your voice.... You [can] devise no fraud in your heart [when] you sing a psalm to God" (*Grace for Grace*, p. 613). Maybe Augustine inspired Luther to choose Psalm 147 for the Grace after meals by writing further, "When you eat and drink, sing a psalm: not by intermingling sweet sounds suited to the ear, but by eating and drinking moderately, frugally, temperately..." Good pastoral care in view of such global hunger—and with Lent just a few weeks away! Why not try it? The prayer is below.

Maybe saying grace before a meal isn't working for you, so why not try a thanksgiving after eating? With the pandemic pushing us into new territory anyway, maybe this is as good a time as any to develop a new spiritual habit too! "Thanksgiving After Meals" from Martin Luther's Small Catechism might be a place to start. Adapt and adjust according to your needs from the full order given below.

THANKSGIVING AFTER MEALS

Similarly, after eating you should in the same manner fold your hands and recite devoutly: "O give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is gracious and The Lord's mercy endures forever, giving food to all people, for the cattle, and for the ravens when they cry. The Lord is not impressed by the might of a horse and has no pleasure with human strength but takes pleasure in those who fear the Lord and wait on the Lord's steadfast love."

Then recite The Lord's Prayer and say:

"We give thanks to you, Lord God our heavenly father, through Jesus Christ our Lord, for all your benefits, you who live and reign forever. Amen."