

A Song of Praise
Pentecost +2 2022
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Zechariah 12:8-10, 13:1, Psalm 63, Galatians 3:23-29, Luke 9:18-24

King David is on the run. His kingdom is divided against itself. His son Absalom has taken over the Holy City and turned part of the people against him. Some of his beloved friends have joined Absalom. As David and his family are leaving, Zadok the priest and a host of Levites meet him on the way. They are carrying the Ark of the Covenant away from Jerusalem. We read in 2 Samuel 15, “Then the king said to Zadok, ‘Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me back and let me see both it and his dwelling place. ²⁶ But if he says, ‘I have no pleasure in you,’ behold, here I am, let him do to me what seems good to him.’” ¹ David is leaving behind the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, the place of worship that he loved so dearly. He is going into the wilderness. He has put his life in the hands of the Lord.

2 Samuel 15:30 reads, “David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, barefoot and with his head covered. And all the people who were with him covered their heads, and they went up, weeping as they went.”²

In the Wilderness of Judah, David cries out to the Lord.

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. ³

This Hebrew word for seek, *Sahar*, is also the word daybreak. David has risen early in the morning to seek the Lord. To cry out to the Lord. To give voice to his thirst for God.

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

The very surroundings reflect the state of David’s soul. Physically he is weary, tired, and thirsty. He turns this physical weakness into a cry for God.

Earlier he sent back Zadok of the Levites with the Ark of the Covenant. They will return to the Tabernacle of David, a place of worship, psalm singing, and magnifying the Lord. At this point, I might clarify there were two tabernacles at this time. The Tabernacle of Moses with the burnt offerings was in Gibeon, but the Ark of the Covenant had been captured earlier by the Philistines. King David restored the Ark of the Covenant, but he brought it to Zion and placed it

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 2 Sa 15:25–26.

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 2 Sa 15:30.

³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 63:1.

in a tent of meeting, or Tabernacle, set aside for worship. David had appointed teams to worship the Lord day and night. As the history of Israel progressed, David's Tabernacle would sometimes fall into disuse. Robert Webber explains that "each time a righteous king initiated a reform and return to the worship of Yahweh, it was accompanied by worship according to the pattern of the tabernacle of David."⁴

In this wilderness place, David looks back to the Tabernacle, the place of singing and worship to God.

So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.⁵

In remembering the worship of God's people, David finds encouragement. In the worship of God's people, David saw the power and glory of the Lord. David exclaims,

Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.⁶

This is a puzzling refrain because we have to have life in order to even be aware of God's steadfast love. David is exclaiming that life cannot not be lived independent of God's love. It is the Lord who sustains him. Even in his humiliation and escape from Absalom, David is still sustained by the steadfast love of God. So even in this position of loss and defeat, David's lips will praise the Lord.

So I will bless you as long as I live;
in your name I will lift up my hands.⁷

Whether in the Holy City or in the wilderness, David will lift up his hands and bless the Lord. So far, David's prayer has included rising early in the morning, remembering the glory of God in the worship of His people, lifting up hands in worship, and opening lips in praise. Now David will compare worship of God to eating the finest meal.

My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food,
and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,⁸
His praise will continue until the close of day.
I remember you upon my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night⁹

⁴ Robert Webber, *The Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship*, 1st ed., vol. 1, The Complete Library of Christian Worship (Nashville, TN: Star Song Pub. Group, 1993), 121.

⁵ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 63:2.

⁶ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 63:3.

⁷ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 63:4.

⁸ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 63:5.

⁹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 63:6.

If the turmoil of this situation wakes him up, he will meditate upon the goodness of the Lord. David's prayer is instructing us where to turn in good times and difficult times. He prays, you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.
My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me. ¹⁰

In the final words of this psalm, David entrusts the outcome of this civil war to God.

⁹ But those who seek to destroy my life
shall go down into the depths of the earth;
¹⁰ they shall be given over to the power of the sword;
they shall be a portion for jackals.
¹¹ But the king shall rejoice in God;
all who swear by him shall exult,
for the mouths of liars will be stopped. ¹¹

Absalom's rebellion collapsed and died. David returned to the throne. Peace and justice were restored. Worship in the Tabernacle continued.

We are made to worship the Lord: morning and evening, day and night, in times of joy and times of sorrow. Our whole body participates in worship. Our mouths in praise, our hands uplifted, in kneeling and sitting, in sleeping and rising.

As I meditated upon Psalm 63 this week, I thought of the ancient Christian Celts and their commitment to worship. These monks wrote magnificent songs of praise to God. They set a pattern in their culture that continues to this day. The Welsh have a tradition of poetry that extends over a thousand years. Before the monks could start writing their own poetry, they memorized the book of Psalms.

As first, it seems unbelievable, but they were praying the psalms all day long every day. In praying the offices, the psalms would have become part of the rhythm of life. As they began to write their own psalms, it would make sense that they would follow in patterns of psalms that they had internalized.

In the Psalm we read today, David's surroundings became part of the prayer and even reflected his inner state. His prayer went beyond the mind to worship that shaped his hands, his body, his lips. His prayer explored all the joys of living like a great feast, like communion with God's people, like the satisfaction of a deep drink in a dry place. All these joys became expressions in his longing for the Lord.

¹⁰ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 63:7–8.

¹¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 63:9–11.

I want to end by simply reading a Welsh poem called “The Loves of Talieson.” It is a song of praise ultimately directed to God. Not how it celebrates the everyday beauties alongside the beauty of a life of faith.

The Loves of Talieson

The beauty of the virtue in doing penance for excess,
Beautiful too that God shall save me.

The beauty of a companion who does not deny me his company,
Beautiful too the drinking horn’s society.

The beauty of a master like Nudd, the wolf of God,
Beautiful too a man who is noble, kind, and generous.

The beauty of berries at harvest time,
Beautiful too the grain on the stalk.

The beauty of the sun, clear in the sky,
Beautiful too they who pay Adam’s debt.

The beauty of a herd’s thick-maned stallion,
Beautiful too the pattern of his plaits.

The beauty of desire and a silver ring,
Beautiful too a ring for a virgin.

The beauty of an eagle on the shore when tide is full,
Beautiful too the seagulls playing.

The beauty of a horse and gold-trimmed shield,
Beautiful too a bold man in the breach.

The beauty of Einion, healer of many,
Beautiful too a generous and obliging minstrel.

The beauty of May with its cuckoo and nightingale,
Beautiful too when good weather comes.

The beauty of a proper and perfect wedding feast,
Beautiful too a gift which is loved.

The beauty of desire for penance from a priest,
Beautiful too bearing the elements to the altar.

The beauty for a minstrel of mead at the head of the hall,
Beautiful too a lively crowd surrounding a hero.

The beauty of a faithful priest in his church,
Beautiful too a chieftain in his hall.

The beauty of a strong parish led by God,
Beautiful too being in the season of Paradise.

The beauty of the moon shining on the earth,
Beautiful too when your luck is good.

The beauty of summer, its days long and slow,
Beautiful too visiting the ones we love.

The beauty of flowers on the tops of fruit trees,
Beautiful too covenant with the Creator.

The beauty in the wilderness of doe and fawn,

Beautiful too the foam-mouthed and slender steed.
The beauty of the garden when the leeks grow well,
Beautiful too the charlock in bloom.
The beauty of the horse in its leather halter,
Beautiful too the king's retinue.
The beauty of a hero who does not shun injury,
Beautiful too is elegant Welsh.
The beauty of the heather when it turns purple,
Beautiful too pasture land for cattle.
The beauty of the season when calves suckle,
Beautiful too riding a foam-mouthed horse.
And for me there is no less beauty
In the father of the horn in a feast of mead.
The beauty of the fish in his bright lake,
Beautiful too its surface shimmering.
The beauty of the word which the Trinity speaks,
Beautiful too doing penance for sin.
But the loveliest of all is covenant
With God on the Day of Judgment.¹²

¹² Bernard McGinn, ed., *Celtic Spirituality*, trans. Oliver Davies, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 283–285. (*Blodeugerdd*, pp. 30–40.) *Blodeugerdd Barddas o Ganu Crefyddol Cynnar*.