

An Analysis of Psalm 111

Some background:

Ps. 111 is an individual psalm of praise. It begins and ends with praise to God. But the Psalmist is also speaking to and for the whole community, much as the priest does when he or she prays for us during the liturgy.

This is a Wisdom Psalm (note how it ends, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," a famous phrase occurring only four times in the OT).

Ps. 111 is an acrostic psalm, i.e., each line begins with a different and successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Ps. 111 is paired with Ps. 112; both are wisdom Psalms, both are acrostics, and even have the same number of syllables.

So, take a look from the bulletin at the copy of Psalm 111 (or in your NRSV Bible) we have there and follow along with me as we go through it.

The two main themes of the Psalm are what God has done, his mighty works, and how we respond to it, as God's people.

1. THE LORD (Who God is and what God has done)

A. God's works described

they are great, faithful, and just
they are full of honor and majesty,
they gain the Lord renown

God makes his works to be remembered, as we do in the Eucharistic memorial we celebrate each Sunday.
they show God's power to his people

B. God's works are named (the Psalmist retraces the events of the exodus, wilderness wandering, and entry into the Promised Land)

God provides food (bread/wine of the Eucharist?) to those who fear him. ("Give us this day our daily bread . . .")

God commanded his everlasting covenant with his people

God provides teaching (precepts) to his people on right living

that is trustworthy, valid forever, and to be faithfully obeyed

God redeemed (rescued and set free) his people

God gives them "the heritage of the nations" (the Promised Land)

C. God's character (who is the God who does these great things, what is this God like?)

God has enduring righteousness (righteousness in the Bible is God's fierce determination to put all things right!)

God is gracious and merciful, full of compassion

God does not forget his covenant with his people (we too are the people of God's new covenant with God's people)

God's name is holy and awesome (the Hebrew word for awesome is directly related to the word "fear" in "the fear of the Lord." It encourages us to remember, something we may have lost, a sense

of the majesty, wonder, glory, and awesomeness of God!)
God is worthy of enduring praise

2. THE LORD'S PEOPLE (Our response to who God is & what God has done)

A. More active

We praise the Lord

We give thanks to the Lord with our whole heart (not a divided heart) in the congregation.

We study (the word means to seek or explore) his works in which we delight (as Craig and Joy Johnson study and take delight in the beautiful works of God in the flora and fauna of their own back yard and this Island.)

We perform (obey) God's teaching with faithfulness and uprightness. (God's commands are summed up in wholehearted love for God and our neighbor as ourselves.)

We humbly acknowledge the Lord (with awe and wonder) as the beginning of living wisely.

We practice submission to God's will in all things, and so gain a good understanding.

B. Less active

We experience God as gracious and merciful, faithful and just.

We experience God's teaching as trustworthy.

We experience the power of God's works.

We receive food (bread/wine, our daily bread) from the Lord.

We receive standing within God's everlasting covenant in Jesus Christ. (Jesus: "This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood.")

We receive "the heritage of the nations" (the Promised Land = the rule and reign of God over us and all people.)

We have been rescued and set free (redeemed) by the Lord from all sin and condemnation to be God's joyful, faithful people. Praise the Lord! Thanks be to God! Amen.