

Psalm 138 with Luke 5: 1-11 Godly Gratitude. 9th Feb 2025

Gratitude has become one of the new therapies for well-being. We read about it in magazine articles to improve our mental health. We are encouraged to focus on the positive, and practice habits like - what are 3 things you can be thankful for today? This became especially important and promoted during the years of the COVID pandemic.

And yet it is not a new thing at all. The bible is full of scripture about thankfulness. The psalms especially. Being thankful *is* good therapy – it lifts our eyes off our difficult circumstances.

For Christians our thankfulness goes beyond being thankful for beauty and relationships and good health, it looks to the Creator of all things good, to the one who made us, who loves us and will always be there for us.

Psalm 138 is a psalm of David, one who knew trouble and hardship – especially during times when he was being chased by King Saul who sought to kill him, or during conflict with surrounding enemies and nations – and yet he praised God.

David knew God and despite his circumstances he continued to praise him for his unfailing love and faithfulness.

David doesn't just offer lip service of praise to God, in verse 1 it says *I praise you, or I give you thanks, Lord, with **all my heart**...* Let me read the psalm again from the Message translation.

1-3 Thank you! Everything in me says "Thank you!"

Angels listen as I sing my thanks.

I kneel in worship facing your holy temple

and say it again: "Thank you!"

Thank you for your love,

thank you for your faithfulness;

Most holy is your name,

most holy is your Word.

The moment I called out, you stepped in;

you made my life large with strength.

⁴⁻⁶When they hear what you have to say, God,
all earth's kings will say "Thank you."
They'll sing of what you've done:
"How great the glory of God!"
And here's why: God, high above, sees far below;
no matter the distance, he knows everything about us.

⁷⁻⁸When I walk into the thick of trouble,
keep me alive in the angry turmoil.
With one hand
strike my foes,
With your other hand
save me.
Finish what you started in me, God.
Your love is eternal—don't quit on me now.

We use the word heart to mean the physical organ or the place of our emotions. The Israelites used the word in the same way. David's thanks and praise emanated from the core of his being – the centre of his life. It represents his whole being. Do we praise God with our whole being? The Message translation puts it like this...*Thank you! **Everything in me** says "Thank you!"*

David's praise and thanks move him to proclamation.

He says he will sing God's praise before 'the (small g) gods'. These 'gods' represent foreign gods, he is promising to witness to an unbelieving or wrongly believing world. He sings to those who worship other 'gods' – today that might mean those who trust in or worship wealth, health, sex, power and other idols.

David thanks God by declaring to others how good God is. He shares his testimony of how God had listened and answered his prayer and he proclaims God's character – his unfailing love and faithfulness.

David knows firsthand of God's love, mercy, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness. And he wants everyone to experience this – he wants *all the*

Kings of the earth to praise you Lord, when they hear what you have decreed. May they sing of the ways of the Lord, for the glory of the Lord is great.

David has experienced God's love and witnessed his glory. This causes him to bow down before God and praise his name. Many may witness God's glory but do not recognize or acknowledge God. Psalm 19 verse 1 says that *the heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*

In Romans 1: 20-23 the apostle Paul says that *since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen...but (many) neither glorified God nor gave thanks to him...and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal human beings and birds and animals and reptiles.*

Many are blind to God's glory today; they worship the created rather than the creator. Like David we need to sing God's praises for all to hear, we need to proclaim his words, his truth and give witness to his love.

As Jesus called Simon Peter in our reading from Luke today, he also calls us to 'fish for people'. That might sound a bit strange but basically it means Jesus wants us to bring people into a relationship with him. Jesus longs for all people to know of his love, worship him and revel in his glory.

But first we need to be caught fully by Jesus. We need to see his glory and like David and Simon Peter bow down before him, to be in awe of him, knowing his love for us. Love that causes us to sing his praise with our whole being, to follow him and proclaim him to the world.

Simon Peter could have just given thanks to Jesus for an amazing catch of fish...but this miracle caused him to really see who Jesus was...the Creator of the world. He rightly bows/ falls down before him, and when Jesus calls him to follow him, and to go and fish for people instead of fish, Peter leaves everything and goes!

As we head to our national Anglican season of Hope25 we are praying for the Holy Spirit to fill us, we are praying that we will have courage to as it were to go 'fishing for people' to share the hope we have in Jesus. We are praying that the Holy Spirit will stir in people's hearts to be soft when we talk to them. We are meeting every Wednesday night to pray and to be encouraged in ways of sharing our faith. We had a great time of prayer last week, prayer is powerful.

I'll also be asking people to share their testimonies so that it becomes natural to talk to others about how we came to know Jesus.

We can share with those who are finding life tough that while God is fully glorious and immortal and powerful, he also looks kindly on the lowly, he sees us, he walks with us in times of trouble as David says in verse 6.

We don't proclaim that people will never have any troubles if they become a Christian, rather we tell them that they can know Jesus' presence and comfort and strength during those times.

As Jesus called Simon Peter, he said "do not be afraid". This is a common line in scripture; we will face hardships and trouble, we will find it difficult to witness to Jesus in this world, but Jesus says, "don't be afraid, for I am with you."

I picked up this book on 12 African grandmas at our recent book sale. It tells of utter atrocities these women had gone through, many being driven from their homes due to conflict, some being mutilated, others carrying children who die from hunger and disease. And yet...many of these women report giving thanks to God for his help or answer to prayers despite their extreme hardships.

Last night I read the chapter on Eugenie, the only one of her family who survived the genocide in Rwanda. She was a Tutsi who was captured rather than killed and for 3 years she was repeatedly raped and lived off little food as they hid in the jungle. She had 2 children during this time. When peace came she discovered she had aids. Eugenie speaks of being happy, she thanks the Lord as David did for preserving her life in the midst of troubles so she can declare God's miracles. The women go to church and sing praises to God. Songs like we sang this morning...*Bless the Lord oh my soul, whatever has passed and whatever lies before me, I worship his holy name.*

These stories reminded me of a biography I read by missionary Dr Helen Roseveare who was in the Congo in the 50's and 60's and was taken hostage and suffered beatings, imprisonment, and threats of death for 5 months by terrorists after independence in 1964. Her story talks of how she came to faith, how she had times of doubt and how she learned to give God glory through all the highs and lows of her time, even the darkest months as a hostage.

She says in her epilogue how her suffering *just seemed to highlight God's love* and that *she learned a little of the tremendous privilege of walking with Jesus, of being identified with Christ*. She prayed, praised, and proclaimed the mercy and goodness and faithfulness of God, just like David did in this psalm 138.

David begins this psalm declaring that God had answered his prayer but finishes with the reality that he will continue to walk in the midst of trouble, trusting that God will save him.

The last verse declares that God will vindicate him, because the Lord's love endures forever – but the final line is another prayer, *do not abandon the works of your hands*. Or as the message puts it...*Finish what you started in me God. Your love is eternal – don't quit on me now!*

I love David's psalms for they are often raw and honest. That last line show that he is still just a bit afraid of what may happen to him despite God answering his prayers in the past. He has devoted most of the psalm to his conviction that God is faithful, so why does he need to plead for God's continued faithfulness? Why? Because he is human and like us probably struggled at times with unbelief.

David gives us permission to acknowledge our unbelief and encourages us to call out to God in those times of doubt – Lord, *I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief!*

Jesus has declared that he will never leave us or forsake us, he will not abandon the works of his hands. *We* are his works, and he will always walk with us, no matter what we are going through. Just like he walked with King David and the Apostle Peter through his life; teaching, disciplining, forgiving and restoring and calling him to continue to walk as his disciple.

As we head into 2025 my prayer is that we embrace the practice of daily gratitude – it is good for us! But let's make it Godly gratitude. I pray that as individuals and as a Church in our community - that we will pray to the Lord, knowing that he hears and answers our prayers, that we will praise and give him thanks with all our heart, our everything- for all his love, goodness, and faithfulness, acknowledging his glory and proclaiming it before our family, our

friends and neighbours. We pray that they may come and see God's glory and bow before him; that they will be totally 'caught' by Jesus, receiving his love and choosing to follow him for all eternity. Amen.

Hope25 Collect

- God of Hope, you call on us to be your witnesses in this uncertain world; by your Spirit awaken in us a true vision of your kingdom, a greater certainty of our salvation, and a deeper dedication to your service; that through our words and actions the same Spirit may bring many who are lost to be found, and for them to celebrate the hope that we can only find in Jesus Christ,
In whose name we pray. Amen.