

Psalm 47

The Ascension
Morning Prayer Wednesday Week 1

This psalm celebrates the enthronement of the king. See 1Kings 1:38-40 for a description of the coronation of Solomon, and 2Kings 11:12 for the coronation of Joash. It has echoes also of the taking of the ark into the city of David (2Samuel 6). Its title reads: 'To the leader. Of the Korahites*. A Psalm*'.

See the Introduction for the article 'Fear of YHWH'. How can we recognise the majesty of God who reigns over the whole world without experiencing a profound sense of awe and wonder, and without realising our own smallness?

In the Hebrew Scriptures, 'fear of YHWH' is primarily a matter of awe at the majesty and mystery of God. However, there is frequently also an element of fear of divine punishment. It is this latter element that is removed by Jesus who taught us to be afraid of our own capacity to reject God, but not to be afraid of God, whom he liked to address as 'Father'. As John says:

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.

– 1John 4:18

'Great king over all the earth': no one is outside the ambit of Jesus' loving influence and attraction. From his pierced heart he fills the universe with his love.

When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.

– John 12:32

... that you may know what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

– Ephesians 1:19-23

I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, 'To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!'

– Revelation 5:13

¹Clap your hands, all you peoples; acclaim God, singing for joy.

²For YHWH*, the Most High, is to be feared*, great king over all the earth.

Sing praise to God

³He subdues peoples under us, and nations under our feet.

⁴Our inheritance is from God, our pride given to Jacob out of love.

⁵God goes up with shouts of joy, YHWH, with the sound of the trumpet.

⁶Sing praise to God, sing praise; sing praise to our King, sing praise.

⁷For God is king of all the earth; sing praise with all your skill.

⁸God is king over the nations; God takes his seat on his holy throne.

⁹The princes of the peoples gather with the people of the God of Abraham.

For the shields of the earth belong to God; he is highly exalted.

The land is the pride and joy of a people who see themselves as the recipients of God's preferential love. We contemplate our inheritance as Christians.

The carrying of the ark up through the city to Solomon's temple recalls God's going up from Egypt with his people.

They are called 'princes' not 'kings', for they are subject to Yahweh, the King. 'Shields' appears to be an honorific title for the leading vassal princes.

The psalmist recalls God's promise to Abraham:

I will make many nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

– Genesis 17:6

Paul sees the Christian outreach to the Gentiles as supported by this promise (Romans 4).

Jesus preached the kingdom of God. He was king on the cross (Matthew 27:37,42). At the resurrection he became 'king of kings' (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 19:16). His reign is universal. God is to be 'all in all' (1 Corinthians 15:28).

We think of Jesus going up to Jerusalem (Luke 9:1), and above all his ascension into heaven to fill the universe (Ephesians 4:9-10).

For a further reflection on this psalm see the liturgy for the feast of the Ascension: the Prayer at the Offertory, the prayer at Communion, and the Preface.