

Psalm 123

14th Sunday Year B
Evening Prayer Monday Week 3
Complementary Psalms 2

Along with all the psalms from 120 to 134, Psalm 123 bears the title ‘A Song of Ascents.’ The psalmist is being humiliated. Is he in exile (compare Psalm 137)? Is he living under the Samaritan governor at the time of the reconstruction of Judah by Nehemiah (see Nehemiah 2:17-20; 4:1-5)? Does he belong to a social class in Judah that is being humiliated by others of their own people (see Nehemiah 5)?

**¹I lift up my eyes to
you who are enthroned
in the heavens.**

The psalmist looks to God knowing that his real value is in relationship to God, and that God will never humiliate.

YHWH, my heart is not proud,
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things too great
and too marvellous for me.
I have quieted myself down, and stilled all my longing.
Like a weaned child with its mother,
my desires are like the weaned child that is with me.
O Israel, hope in YHWH now and forever.

– Psalm 131

God’s heart goes out to the humiliated.

Who is like YHWH our God, who is seated on high,
who lowers his gaze to the heavens and the earth?
He raises the poor from the dust,
and lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes,
with the princes of his people.
He gives the barren woman a home,
making her the joyous mother of children. Praise YH!

– Psalm 113:5-9

My eyes are fixed on YHWH, yes, he will disentangle my
feet from the net. Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I
am lonely and poor. Relieve the troubles of my heart, and
bring me out of my distress. Observe my affliction and my
trouble, and forgive all my sins.

– Psalm 25:15-18

My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.

– Psalm 69:3

My eyes grow dim with watching for your promise;
I ask, ‘When will you comfort me?’

– Psalm 119:82

My eyes are turned toward you, O God, my Lord;
in you I seek refuge; do not leave me defenceless.

– Psalm 141:8

You, O Lord, are a God
tenderly compassionate, and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in kindness
and faithfulness.

– Psalm 86:15 (= Psalm 103:8)

YHWH is gracious and tenderly compassion-
ate ... ever mindful of his covenant.

– Psalm 111:4-5

I called on YHWH's name: 'YHWH, I pray,
save my life!' Gracious is YHWH, and
righteous; our God is tenderly compassion-
ate. YHWH protects the naïve and immature;
when I was brought low, he saved me.

– Psalm 116:4-6

YHWH is gracious and tenderly compassion-
ate, slow to anger and abounding in kindness.
YHWH is good to all, and his compassion is
over all that he has made.

– Psalm 145:8-9

From the Christian liturgy we are familiar
with verse 3 which in the Greek reads: *kurie*
eleēson [κυριε ελεησον].

'I' in verse 4 translates Hebrew *nepeš*. See the
article 'Being' in the Introduction. We think
of Jesus' words:

The Son of Man is to go through many
sufferings and be treated with contempt.

– Mark 9:12

We contemplate Jesus being mocked by the
soldiers (Mark 15:18-19), by those who were
passing by (Mark 15:30), by the leaders (Mark
15:31-32) and by those who were being cruci-
fied with him (Mark 15:32).

The people stood by, watching; but the lead-
ers scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others;
let him save himself if he is the Messiah
of God, his chosen one!' The soldiers also
mocked him, coming up and offering him
sour wine.

– Luke 23:35-36

**²As the eyes of male slaves wait
for the gesture of their master, as
the eyes of female slaves wait for
the gesture of their mistress,
so our eyes look to YHWH* our
God as we wait for signs of his
tender compassion* towards us.**

**³Have mercy upon us, YHWH,
have mercy upon us.**

**⁴I* have had more than I can take
of the scorn of the arrogant, of
the contempt of the proud.**

The folly of looking down on others

We recall also Jesus' words, picked up later by Peter:

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you
and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely because of me.

– Matthew 5:11

If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory,
which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

– 1Peter 4:14

The psalmist encourages us to reflect on the folly of being self-satisfied and looking down on others (see the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector, Luke 18:9-14).

By the grace of God I am what I am.

– 1Corinthians 15:10

Whoever belittles another lacks sense, but an intelligent person remains silent.

– Proverbs 11:12

Those who mock the poor insult their Maker;
those who are glad at calamity will not go unpunished.

– Proverbs 17:5

Those who despise their neighbours are sinners,
but happy are those who are kind to the poor.

– Proverbs 14:21

Do not cheat the poor of their living, and do not keep needy eyes waiting.
Do not grieve the hungry or anger one in need.
Do not add to the troubles of the desperate or delay giving to the needy.
Do not reject a suppliant in distress, or turn your face away from the poor.
Do not avert your eye from the needy, and give no one reason to curse you;
for if in bitterness of soul some should curse you, the Creator will hear their prayer.

– Sirach 4:1-6

The wisdom of the humble lifts their heads high,
and seats them among the great.
Do not praise individuals for their good looks,
or loathe anyone because of appearance alone ...
Do not boast about wearing fine clothes,
and do not exalt yourself when you are honoured.

– Sirach 11:1-4