

The book of Psalms, also called the Psalter, is a collection of 150 poems. Originally, leaders wrote and used psalms in worship. Most of the poems are either songs of praise or prayers (often for help) that were sung or spoken. The writers tell about going into God's house (the temple) and performing acts of worship, including playing music and singing, shouting joyfully, lifting up hands in prayer, making sacrifices, and making good on promises to God.

Later, communities passed along the psalms as sacred text or scripture and their value for instruction became more important. Communities saw that the Psalms could teach folks about God, God's will, and faithful living.

There are very different types of psalms. There are prayers for help (known as laments)—there are songs of praise (hymns)—there are psalms of thanks, psalms of trust, wisdom psalms (offering instruction to the faithful), and even historical psalms that recite major events in the history of the people.

Psalms 111, with the verses we read today, is a poem of praise. Now, here's some trivia you might need if you ever end up on Jeopardy or such. The structure of the poem calls attention to the first letter of each line—and reading from bottom to top (that is, from verse 13 to verse 11), the first letters of each line spell the Hebrew word that means "king," drawing attention to God's kingship.

As we read Psalm 145, you will find a consistent theme throughout those verses. Totality! I think you find the word “all” at least 13 times. ALL works, ALL deeds, The eyes of ALL, ALL ways, ALL doings, ALL who call. And more! This is no accident. The psalm is intentionally written to amplify the majesty of God. If you leave this passage feeling like God is big, that’s the point.

Some strands of Christian thought would have you believe the idea that God is only present when good things are happening. It’s hard for us to see God as present and powerful when we are struggling. But even more, we can get into that mindset of believing that God is somehow more present with those who are doing well.

But this Psalm says that ain’t the way it is. It breaks that myth. Somehow—in some manner, the Lord is faithful in “all the Lord’s words.” Gracious in “all deeds”. God is “just in all God’s ways,” and “kind in all God’s doings.”

All? Even through pandemics? And losing loved ones? And violence? And climate change? All? Really?? It is healthy, and quite important, I think—to read this passage with some skepticism. If you’ve ever felt like God has abandoned you, you might not want to hear scripture like “even when my mother and

father have forsaken me.” If you’ve ever felt weak or helpless, you probably don’t want to hear “they shall run, and not faint!”

A God who is faithful matters when you feel God is blessing everyone but you. A God who “satisfies the desire of every living thing” matters when you see desperation and scarcity in your community. A God who “is near” matters when you feel so distant from the Divine. This passage might be descriptive of glimpses that the psalmist may have felt over time in their own life.

In the production of *The Wiz*, there is a song written by Charlie Smalls and sung by Theresa Merritt called *The Feeling That We Have*.

*“And I’d like to know it’s there; The feeling that we have;
When you know that you can come running to me; Whenever
times are bad; Don’t lose the feeling that we have”*

Something *home-y* emerges from this Psalm. In the film *The Wiz*, Auntie Em (played by Theresa Merritt) maybe expresses the heart of what this Psalm attempts. When we are in community with each other, we can be delicate and unsure together. We don’t have to have all the answers! We can just exist, without pretense. Family, at its best, is the place where you can remember you are a human being. Whether through your family of origin

or your family of choice, we all deserve to have rich and meaningful experiences.

Some years back, I was doing a unit of clinical pastoral education, called a summer intensive, at Iowa Methodist hospital. I was assigned to the unit where folks rehab from a stroke episode, and we had a group who identified with Christianity. I had picked up cues from aids and workers there about acts of kindness that the residents had done on behalf of others on the unit. After offering these observations I said something to the effect of, “And that is how you are the body of Christ.” Perhaps in some small way, they sensed their participation as entwined within the mighty acts of God.

Take a look at all the sensory experiences in verses 14-18.

The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.

Who holds you when you fall? Who raises you up when you are disheartened?

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.

Who nourishes you, with spiritual and physical food? Who do you look to for a good meal? For a good bit of advice?

You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.

Who in your life might have a soft spot for animals and plants?

The Lord is just in all the Lord's ways, and kind in all the Lord's doings.

Is there a friend you trust when you need to know if you're being fair? Someone who can tell you "now, you know you're out of order. But I love you anyway."

The Lord is near to all who call, to all who call in truth.

Is there someone you can call with your most vulnerable truth? Even someone who wouldn't mind picking up the phone at 2AM and driving to meet you in your time of need?

It doesn't happen just within the 4 walls of the church. You find community where you are. In life-sustaining friendships. In neighbors. In the sounds of children playing. Maybe in those old family photos and stories. If you find the time, go back into these verses of scripture and see if there are faces and names that emerge for you.

May we all strive to—try to—live into our highest selves by following the model of a loving, compassionate, present, and caring God.

Thanks be to God!