

God's Gratitude Playlist: Psalm 118

November 21, 2021

Overarching Theme: In 2021, FUMC will be SENT with the peace of Christ!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

On Easter evening, the Risen Christ appears to his gathered disciples for the first time since Good Friday and speaks these words: "*Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you*" (John 20:21). Just as Jesus sent his disciples into a divided, conflicted 1st Century with his peace, so he sends us into a divided, conflicted 2021 with his peace.

Reflect on this Scripture: Psalm 118 NRSV

- ¹ O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!*
- ² Let Israel say,
"His steadfast love endures forever."*
- ³ Let the house of Aaron say,
"His steadfast love endures forever."*
- ⁴ Let those who fear the LORD say,
"His steadfast love endures forever."*
- ⁵ Out of my distress I called on the LORD;
the LORD answered me and set me in a broad place.*
- ⁶ With the LORD on my side I do not fear.
What can mortals do to me?*
- ⁷ The LORD is on my side to help me;
I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.*
- ⁸ It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to put confidence in mortals.*
- ⁹ It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to put confidence in princes.*

- 10 All nations surrounded me;
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!*
- 11 They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side;
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!*
- 12 They surrounded me like bees;
they blazed^[a] like a fire of thorns;
in the name of the LORD I cut them off!*
- 13 I was pushed hard,^[b] so that I was falling,
but the LORD helped me.*
- 14 The LORD is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.*
- 15 There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous:
"The right hand of the LORD does valiantly;
16 the right hand of the LORD is exalted;
the right hand of the LORD does valiantly."*
- 17 I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of the LORD.*
- 18 The LORD has punished me severely,
but he did not give me over to death.*
- 19 Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the LORD.*
- 20 This is the gate of the LORD;
the righteous shall enter through it.*
- 21 I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.*
- 22 The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.*
- 23 This is the LORD's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.*
- 24 This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.^[c]*
- 25 Save us, we beseech you, O LORD!
O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!*
- 26 Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.^[d]
We bless you from the house of the LORD.*
- 27 The LORD is God,
and he has given us light.
Bind the festal procession with branches,
up to the horns of the altar.^[e]*

*28 You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God, I will extol you.*

*29 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.*

This Week: Psalm 118

Psalm 118 is the last psalm in a group of six psalms known as the “the Egyptian Hallel”, (Psalms 113-118), psalms that are recited by observant Jews on Jewish holidays as an act of praise and thanksgiving. They are used in present-day Jewish life at the Passover meal on the eighth day of that annual spring celebration.

Psalms 113 and 114 are recited before the meal. Psalms 115-118 are recited at the conclusion of the meal while drinking the fourth cup of celebratory wine. Many scholars maintain that in ancient Jewish life Psalm 118 was used in liturgical processions, perhaps an entrance liturgy into the temple in Jerusalem. According to the Mishnah, a document that interprets the Torah, the procession around the altar that took place on seven successive days during the Feast of Tabernacles was accompanied by the recitation of Psalm 118:27.

In present-day Christian use, Psalm 118 is used during Holy Week and the Easter season. All four of the New Testament gospel writers use the words of Psalm 118:26 — “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord” — in their Palm Sunday narratives (Matthew 21:9; Mark 11:9-10; Luke 19:38; and John 12:13). In Mark 12, Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22 — “The stone the builders rejects has become a cornerstone” — as the explanation for the so-called Parable of the Vineyard. Peter quotes the same verse in Acts 4:11 in reference to Jesus; Paul alludes to it in Ephesians 2:20-21; and the words of Psalm 118:6 — “The Lord is for me; I will not fear” — echo in Romans 8:3 and Hebrews 13:6. Thus, Psalm 118 has a rich and varied history of transmission and use in both Jewish and Christian life.

The timeless appeal of Psalm 118 may have something to do with its form and content. It is said that the psalm “abounds in liturgical forms and rhythmic, repetitious, formulaic phrases and shouts.” It is an Individual Hymn of Thanksgiving, a psalm in which a single voice praises God for God’s goodness to or on behalf of that individual, usually for deliverance from some trying situation. But in Psalm 118, the words of the individual hymn singer are woven into the liturgy of the gathered worshiping community. Thus, the voice of the psalmist moves back and forth between the singular

and the plural, as the individual worshiper approaches God in the context of corporate worship with thanks for deliverance from trouble.

The Psalm begins with worshipers being called together to “give thanks to the Lord” because of the Lord’s goodness and steadfast love. The words of verse 1 are typical gathering words, used in many calls to worship in the Hebrew Bible (see Psalms 106:1; 107:1; 136:1; 1 Chronicles 16:34; 2 Chronicles 5:13; 7:3; 20:21). The word translated as “steadfast love” is *hesed*. A prominent Jewish scholar defines *hesed* as “a free-flowing love that knows no bounds.” *Hesed* is most closely connected conceptually with the covenant relationship between God and children of Israel (see Genesis 17:7 and Exodus 19:5-6, for example).

In verse 2 Israel is called upon to say (declare publicly for all to hear), “His *hesed* endures forever”; his free flowing love that knows no bounds endures forever. This is followed with a call to “the house and Aaron” and “those who fear the LORD” to do likewise. After verse 4 the word *hesed* does not appear again in Psalm 118 until its closing verse, v. 29. Therefore, we may be permitted to understand verses 5-28 as a description, an “example story” of *hesed*.

In the midst of that “example story” we hear, “God is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation,” repeating exactly the words that Moses, Miriam, and the children of Israel sang in Exodus 15:2 after they crossed the Red Sea; the singer of Psalm 118 likens the help (salvation) rendered in the present situation to the help God gave to the Israelites in the Exodus. The psalmist has escaped; the enemy has perished; a new life lies ahead.

Verses 15b and 16 echo Exodus 15 (vv.6, 12) as well, celebrating in a three-fold summary the might of the right hand of the Lord. And in verse 17, the psalmist affirms, “I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD.”

The words of verse 22 (“the stone the builders rejected”) are quoted and alluded to in many places in the New Testament, appropriated by its writers as a metaphor for Jesus (see Mark 12:10-12; Acts 4:11; Ephesians 2:20-21; and 1 Peter 2:4-8). In the ancient Israelite context, we may understand the “stone” as the psalm singer, who has not been cast off, but has become a cornerstone, an essential element in the construction of the life of the ancient Israelite faithful.

Verse 23 states emphatically that all of this is the Lord’s doing. The NRSV says “it is marvelous in our eyes.” The word “marvelous,” (from the Hebrew

root *pala*) actually means "too difficult to understand." How could a stone that the builders reject become a cornerstone? In verse 24, the voice of the community appears clearly for the first time in the psalm and declares, "This is the day the Lord made," and admonishes hearers, "Let us rejoice and be joyful."

Let us rejoice and be joyful!

-- Adapted from New Interpreters Commentary, Vol IV, p. 1153-1156

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. Psalm 118 starts with a call to give thanks to God because God's free flowing boundless love endures forever. Where have you witnessed God's boundless love in your life? When have you been able to share that love with another?
2. As Christians we hear vs 22 (*The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.*) as an allusion to Jesus. What is your understanding of Jesus as both the rejected stone and as the cornerstone of our faith? Do you know other examples of someone who was rejected but then became part of the foundation of something great?
3. In this Psalm we hear one of our great calls to worship (*This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.*) How do you rejoice in this day?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC and/or journal in the "*Morning by Morning*" gratitude resource.
2. Write your own brief Psalm or prayer of gratitude this week. Include how you rejoice.
3. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Psalm 118:1
O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!