

21/02/2021 Psalm 25 First Sunday in Lent

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Let's start with these words from today's psalm: **[Remember] your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love,**

for they have been from of old.

Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;

according to your steadfast love remember me,

for your goodness' sake, O LORD!

The key word in this section is 'remember'.

It's a big word in Scripture, and it's one that's worth dwelling on

Because sometimes we think that to remember

Is mainly an act of the mind

That it's in the realm of theory, not practice

But that's not how it is in Scripture

It's very often not how it is in every day life, either

For example: if you've lost your keys

And you suddenly remember where they are

What happens? Of course you act

You immediately go to get them

Or if you are in the presence of a friend

And you remember it's their birthday

What happens? At the very least you say happy birthday.

The link between remembering and acting is strong

Not just in life, but also in Scripture

And in Scripture when it says God remembers

It means that God is acting, that he is doing something

With this in mind, let's hear the word of the Lord

As it's written in Psalm 25:

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

O my God, in you I trust;

**do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.**

**Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.**

First of all the psalm is one of trust in God's word.

Perhaps if you think of someone raising their hands in prayer
You could get a body language picture of what is going on
The psalmist is entrusting themselves to God
In the midst of their enemies.

As is normal in the psalms, the enemies are not named
And it's good for us to remember as Christian people, that,
as St Pauls says, **our struggle is not against enemies of blood and
flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the
cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of
evil in the heavenly places.**

There is a spiritual struggle going on
And only God can deliver us from evil.

So the psalmist asks God for help
Listen to what he says:

**Make me to know your ways, O LORD;
teach me your paths.**

**Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.**

Notice that there is a basic attitude or outlook at work here.

The psalmist is someone who wants to know God's will,
And to walk on the path that God sets out.

Contrast this, by the way, with someone who comes to God's word
Seeking to have their own wishes and desires validated
And to have their own chosen way of life approved of by God.
We'll come back to this point later in the sermon.

Then we get the words I quoted at the beginning of the sermon:
**[Remember] your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.**

**Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for your goodness' sake, O LORD!**

First of all the psalmist want God to remember, to act on
His, God's, mercy and steadfast love

Notice, by that way, he repeats his request that God remember
His steadfast love.

So the psalmist is not coming before God asking for help
Based on his own goodness or worthiness or merit
But on the basis of who God is.

Here the psalmist is making use of God's name

As God had revealed it in on Mt Sinai

This is what we read in Exodus 34,

when God revealed his glory to Moses:

**'The Lord, the Lord,
a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger,
and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,
keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation,
forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,
yet by no means clearing the guilty,
but visiting the iniquity of the parents
upon the children
and the children's children,
to the third and the fourth generation.'**

God reveals what his name means, who he is:

One who is merciful and gracious

One who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

One who is generous in this love, and who restrains his vengeance.

And the psalmist comes to God asking God to remember who he is

To act according to his nature: to be merciful, to show steadfast love.

But notice also that the psalmist also asks God *not* to remember
He says: **Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;**
In other words, don't act in judgement on the things I did
When I was not mature
Don't act in vengeance against my sins.
Now the psalmist does not specify what the sins of his youth are
No doubt we can all think our own sins of youth
And fill in some of the blanks for ourselves.

However, the context suggests, at least to me
That perhaps the main part of the sins of his youth
Was an unwillingness to be taught by God
Because listen to how he goes on:

Good and upright is the LORD;

therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

He leads the humble in what is right,

and teaches the humble his way.

**All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.**

Notice how the sinners and the humble are brought together
We might think that the sinners and the humble
would be two different groups, but

The difference between the righteous and the wicked in the psalms
Is not between those who have sinned and those who haven't, because
As St Paul says, **all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.**

The difference is between

those who confess their sins and those who do not

those who honour God's word and those who do not

and between those who let God teach them, and those who won't.

We hear this same sort of thing in Isaiah

Listen God's word: **Thus says the LORD: Heaven is my throne and the
earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me,
and what is my resting-place? All these things my hand has made,**

and so all these things are mine, says the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word.

This is Isaiah chapter 66, and text goes on:

Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word: Your own people who hate you and reject you for my name's sake have said, 'Let the LORD be glorified, so that we may see your joy'; but it is they who shall be put to shame.

This is the same sort of language that we have in today's psalm
And gives us encouragement to admit that we have sinned
To listen is reverent fear to God's word
And to entrust ourselves to God, who delivers us from evil.

To close the sermon I want to return to the last words
Of today's assigned psalm selection:

**All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.**

...for those who keep his *covenant* and decrees.

This can sound burdensome

Until we remember the central way we keep God's covenant

Sunday by Sunday we meet as God's people

And celebrate the Lord's supper *in remembrance* of Jesus

It's not that this remembrance is simply a mental act

That it's theoretical: we *do* something

We take the blessed bread and cup

We eat and drink the body of our Lord *for the forgiveness of sins*

And we show that our hope as sinners is in Christ Jesus

The one in whom God remembers all his promises

The one in whom God acts to deliver us from evil

And the one who is the way, the truth, and the life.

So let us lift up our hearts and souls to the Lord

And entrust ourselves to the one

Who will teach us and lead us on the paths of God.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

