

## Message for January 31, 2021

### Psalm 111 - Gratitude and Reverence

Psalm 111 is described by Richard Bruxvoort-Colligan as a “happy little song of praise to God who has done wonderful things.” The psalm then goes on to name a few of those amazing things that God has done.<sup>1</sup>

This Psalm and the one following it are acrostic. An acrostic is a poem or other form of writing in which the first letter of each line spells out a word, message or the alphabet. In the case of Psalm 111, it is the Hebrew alphabet. The first line begins with *aleph*, the second with *bet*, and so on. An acrostic poem can be used as a mnemonic device - a way of helping us remember. Here, we remember the great things that God has done and all the reasons that we have to give thanks.

I also remember all those poems we worked on in grade school. The ones that spelled our “Remember” down the side of the page for Remembrance Day. Or “Thanksgiving” for Thanksgiving. Or the ones that used our own names as a way to describe ourselves and get to know one another. There are only some many adjectives that start with E. And I’m not particularly exotic, or elegant, or exciting...

When it comes to Psalm 111, the Rev. Michael T. Hillier notes that “what is interesting is the indefinite nature of the “acts” of God. It allows the reader or reciter to fill in the blanks with their own experience of God’s acts.”<sup>2</sup> He goes on to note that doing so, leads to understanding and gratitude, and to relationship with God.

This got me thinking about filling in the blanks ourselves, and another word game we used to play: MadLibs. Hear me out. It might feel a bit silly and strange, but I think it could be a good exercise for us. A stretching of our liturgical muscles, if you will. My hope is that however it feels, the joy of creating it will bring us closer to God and spark those memories of all that God has done and all that we have to be grateful for.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/epiphany4b>

<sup>2</sup> <http://breakopenword.blogspot.com/2021/01/the-fourth-sunday-after-epiphany-31.html>

## Psalm 111 (from the Inclusive Bible) as a MadLib

Alleluia!

I will thank you, YHWH \_\_\_\_\_, (*name for God*)

with all my heart

in the meeting of the just and their assembly \_\_\_\_\_. (*location*)

Great are your works \_\_\_\_\_, (*noun*)

to be pondered by all who love them.

Majestic and glorious are your works \_\_\_\_\_, (*noun*)

and your justice stands firm forever.

You make us remember your wonders \_\_\_\_\_ — (*noun*)

you are compassion and love.

You give food \_\_\_\_\_ (*noun*)

to those who revere you,

keeping your Covenant ever in mind.

You reveal to your people the power \_\_\_\_\_ (*adjective*)

of your actions \_\_\_\_\_ (*noun pl.*)

by giving them the lands of the nations \_\_\_\_\_ (*noun pl.*)

as their inheritance.

The works of your hands are truth and justice,

and all your precepts are sure,

standing firm forever and ever,

and carried out uprightly \_\_\_\_\_ and faithfully \_\_\_\_\_.

(*adverbs*)

You have sent deliverance \_\_\_\_\_ (*name for Jesus*)

to your people and established your Covenant forever.

Your Name is holy and awe-inspiring!

Reverence for YHWH \_\_\_\_\_ (*name for God*)

is the beginning of wisdom—

and those who have it prove themselves wise.

Your praise will last forever!

Perhaps the idea is a bit out there and goofy. But to voice our thanks to God is a part of our spiritual formation. When we don't know how to pray, it can be as simple as opening our Bible to the middle, where we find the Psalms and taking our cues from there.

When we look at verse 6, we can see a concrete example of acts of God that need to be remembered and kept in mind – God's gift of creation to God's people. Then, we expand to other less tangible, but no less important, gifts: faithfulness and justice, commandments, truth, equity, and redemption.

Gratitude and reference are a mark of faithful living in all the major world religions. But that doesn't make it easy. There are few difficulties that get in our way. The first being that we often want to take credit ourselves, pat ourselves on the back for anything we have "achieved," whether or not privilege, or luck, or even providence had a hand in that. Next, we sometimes feel entitled. If something is "owed" to us, why would we be grateful? Lastly, we can just straight up fail to recognize our blessings. We've talked about how blessings don't always seem like blessings, they're tricky that way. But this psalm points us in the right direction. It shows us how gratitude is a basic orientation to life. And it gives us a place to start. Ironically, that's right at the end of the Psalm, with that oft quoted line: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*

This isn't fear as we know the word. It's better translated as *awe* or *deep respect*. Richard Bruxvoort-Colligan calls it "natural reverence rooted in genuine trust." That is where we start to understand the holy. That is where our gratitude begins. When we realize how deeply God desires relationship with us. This One who has created the beauty all around us, the place that sustains us. The One who offers us directions for living, showing us the way by walking among us, and promising to be with us always. It can't help but fill us with wonder, and awe, and reverence. And that is only the beginning. Thanks be to God. Amen.