

## Thought for the Week

*Thought for the day is based on one of the day's lectionary readings.*

*For the Bible online, go to: <http://bible.oremus.org/>*

*Choose your version (we use NRSV in church)*

*Copy and paste the reference into the search box and the passage will be displayed.*

### **Wednesday 13 January**

#### **Psalm 119.105-128**

It's quite a while since we had a 'thought' based on a psalm. I think we have read part of Psalm 119 before because I remember explaining that it's an acrostic psalm, very cleverly constructed to follow the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The whole long work is in praise of the word of God and in the light of the Christian faith we can see this referring to Jesus as well as the word of God in the OT.

In keeping with the season of epiphany, we start 'your word is a lantern to my feet and a light upon my path.' A guide to show the way and a bright comforting companion in the dark.

As we read this passage I feel that the writer is moving from hope to sadness to despair and back to hope and even joy, in his or her reflections. It's as if they're saying 'things are pretty bad, Lord, actually, at the moment, but I take heart when I think of you and all you have done for me and your love and how I can trust you. Yet things are really bad, and all that keeps coming back into my mind; and I keep having to remind myself to turn away from depressing thoughts and back to you, and remember your help is right here.

For me, this makes it a very suitable psalm for today, for this time of year when Christmas is over and the weather is grim and there is lots of winter still to get through; for the pandemic which just goes on; for any time when we desperately need the gift of perseverance and a respite from worry and bad news.

So let's trace those shifts in mood through the psalm. After the lantern of the first verse, he says 'I am troubled above measure...and my soul is ever in my hand.' Sounds like life is fragile and unpredictable. Well, that's familiar.

But then in verse 111 the mood changes. 'Your testimonies are the very joy of my heart. ' – there is something good in the world after all, and it's God, and God stands for all that is true and good and just and right.

And he goes on 'you are my hiding place and my shield'. That might sound a bit escapist. But let's be fair. Which of us would not take a break if we could from the grim reality around us? Then he bursts out, 'Away from me you wicked! I will keep the commandments of my God'. So he hasn't escaped at all, he is fighting off evil and reaffirming his determination to stick with God's way and not give up on faith.

He turns back to God: 'Sustain me, let me not be disappointed in my hope. Hold me up and I shall be saved.' Recognising his own fragility he leans on God.

Well, it goes on like that and you can follow the process yourself. It's so honest, this prayer, and human. It is very hard to concentrate on our prayers when we're anxious or afraid and angry. No wonder he has to keep on coming back to God. And his fears and doubts keep popping back up in his mind.

We experience this too, and perhaps we can make part of this prayer our own. A way of reminding ourselves that we are not alone, there is support and nurture available to us.

There is goodness and life and joy to draw on, even when we feel far from all those lovely things.

And we can follow this example. Keep bringing our minds back to that source of life and love and hope and peace that is God. Over and over again, bring your mind back to that, from the preoccupations of anxiety, fear or anger. Yes I am feeling all those things. But at the same time, here is God; God still is; 'Therefore I love your commandments, above gold, even much fine gold.'

*Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy in this time of uncertainty and distress. Sustain and support the anxious and fearful, and lift up all who are brought low; that we may rejoice in your comfort, knowing that nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*