

## Monday March 29 Psalm 103:1–12 - Praise my soul the king of heaven

- 1 Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
- 2 Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—
- 3 who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,
- 4 who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion,
- 5 who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
- 6 The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.
- 7 He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel:
- 8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.
- 9 He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever;
- 10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

*"The best example ... involves characteristic patterning and rhetoric, with suspension and inversion: it uses, as the metrical Psalms do, words in an unexpected order, but it does so in such a way as to make that departure from the normal speech order a source of strength rather than weakness."*

This description on the web site *Hymnology Archive* of a well-known hymn is hardly going to make your heart race. Singing it might do the trick, though. It was sung at the wedding in 1947 of Princess Elizabeth, now our Queen, of course, and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh; it was also sung at the funeral in 2018 of former U.S. President George H.W. Bush. I'm talking about Henry Francis Lyte's 1834 work 'Praise my soul the king of heaven'. But when he was first ordained in 1815 after studying theology at Trinity College Dublin, he would not have been able to pen its marvellous words. His biographer B.G. Skinner says that his "sense of vocation was vague at this early stage. Perhaps he felt an indefinable desire to do something good in life." Not long after this, however, he visited a clergy colleague who was dying, who convinced Lyte that he had not taken Paul's New Testament epistles seriously enough. He undertook to study them afresh and the result was an inner revolution a little like that of John Wesley, whose heart had been "strangely warmed" years earlier when listening to the Epistle to the Romans being read. He was soon preaching very different sermons, following the example of local clergy colleagues whom he had previously laughed at and considered "enthusiastic rhapsodists."

As well as his sermons, he wrote hymns including 'Abide with me' and the hymn that I began with: 'Praise my soul the king of heaven', based on verses from Psalm 103. At the start of this Holy Week, when we follow the events that led to the Lord's crucifixion, let's dwell on Lyte's great hymn of praise, and especially on its 3<sup>rd</sup> line, in which, he proclaimed, we are 'ransom'd, healed, restored, forgiven'. For me this is a glorious statement of what took place when Jesus died on the cross, and how He accomplished His Father's work of seeking and saving the lost.

There are four words in that 3<sup>rd</sup> line, so I'll take one of them each day from tomorrow through to Good Friday. It's not dry theology: it's living theology pointing to One who can transform lives in the way that He transformed Lyte's. The line that follows asks 'Who like me His praise should sing?' The question expresses awe and wonder; may we experience the same as we travel through this very different Holy Week.