

## Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April

### Psalm 116

<sup>1</sup> I love the Lord, because he has heard  
my voice and my supplications.  
<sup>2</sup> Because he inclined his ear to me,  
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.  
<sup>3</sup> The snares of death encompassed me;  
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;  
I suffered distress and anguish.  
<sup>4</sup> Then I called on the name of the Lord:  
'O Lord, I pray, save my life!'

<sup>12</sup> What shall I return to the Lord  
for all his bounty to me?  
<sup>13</sup> I will lift up the cup of salvation  
and call on the name of the Lord,  
<sup>14</sup> I will pay my vows to the Lord  
in the presence of all his people.  
<sup>15</sup> Precious in the sight of the Lord  
is the death of his faithful ones.  
<sup>16</sup> O Lord, I am your servant;  
I am your servant, the child of your serving-  
maid.  
You have loosed my bonds.  
<sup>17</sup> I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice  
and call on the name of the Lord.  
<sup>18</sup> I will pay my vows to the Lord  
in the presence of all his people,  
<sup>19</sup> in the courts of the house of the Lord,  
in your midst, O Jerusalem.  
Praise the Lord!

My God, I love thee; not because  
I hope for heaven thereby,  
nor yet because who love thee not  
are lost eternally.  
Thou, O my Jesus, thou didst me  
upon the cross embrace;  
for me didst bear the nails and spear,  
and manifold disgrace,

And griefs and torments numberless,  
and sweat of agony;  
yea, death itself; and all for one  
who was thine enemy.  
Then why, O blessed Jesus Christ,  
should I not love thee well,  
not for the sake of winning heaven,  
nor of escaping hell;

Not with the hope of gaining aught,  
not seeking a reward;  
but as thyself hast loved me,  
O ever loving Lord!  
So would I love thee, dearest Lord,  
and in thy praise will sing,  
solely because thou art my God  
and my most loving King.

17<sup>th</sup> Century tr Edward Caswall (1814-7)

When I read the first verse of Psalm 116 I read, "I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my supplications."

If anyone were to ask you why you love Jesus what would your answer be?

Is my love conditional on what God does for me? Do I love God for what he will provide me with?

Do you love a person for what they give to you or just for whom they are? A parent has an innate love for a child because "it is" before he or she can do anything to earn love.

God loves you because you are you; not for what you can do. As a loving God/Parent he invites you to respond to that love.

The one who loves "does" for the one they love because they love not desiring a reward. Where true love is shared and mutual, actions happen both ways automatically.

The sign of mutual love is mutual loving actions.

It was nearly 40 years ago in my early days of local preacher studies that the two or three of us meeting with the minister who was the Local Preacher tutor at the time were asked the question, "why do you love God"? I know we fumbled around for answers that had some depth to them, though I cannot remember what they were, and then we were directed to the hymn I have included above – it is not in Singing the Faith.

The author of the hymn written in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century puts it quite simply, "solely because thou art my God and my most loving King." God is loved because God is God and a loving God at that.

Often we want to know what we ought to do for God, almost as obligation. Are we obliged to do anything? When I was in college I used the word "ought" and got picked up on it by an external assessor – of course I was 30 years younger and therefore believed I was correct. A few years later I looked back and realised he had a point, it may have been a game of semantics, use of words, but I am invited to respond in a loving response not obliged to.

The psalmist wants to know what he can give back to God for all the blessings he has received. One thing he can do is to keep his vows, his promises to God and to act like a servant, but a servant who has been redeemed, given freedom, to be obedient from choice and gratitude rather than duty.

In Jesus we find our freedom, freedom from being slaves to sin, Romans 6:6-7, and freedom to live as children of God. Freedom to live in love, act in love; and what does our loving parent desire of us but that we "to act justly, to love mercy, and walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8