

July 15 th	Genesis 41	68 O thou my soul bless God the Lord
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Today's hymn is the metrical version of Psalm 103

- 1 O thou my soul, bless God the Lord ;
and all that in me is
be stirrèd up his holy name
to magnify and bless.
- 2 Bless, O my soul, the Lord thy God,
and not forgetful be
of all his gracious benefits
he hath bestowed on thee.
- 3 All thine iniquities who doth
most graciously forgive :
who thy diseases all and pains
doth heal, and thee relieve.
- 4 Who doth redeem thy life, that thou
to death mayest not go down ;
who thee with loving-kindness doth
and tender mercies crown :
- 5 Who with abundance of good things
doth satisfy thy mouth ;
so that even as the eagle's age,
renewèd is thy youth.

In his commentary, *George Knight* calls these 5 verses '*Wholehearted Gratitude*', and the rest of the Psalm '*Amazing Grace*'.

Henry Francis Lyte was inspired by this Psalm to write the well-loved hymn '*Praise my Soul the King of Heaven*'. Although Lyte was born near Kelso, he died in Nice while travelling to a better climate for his health (if you ever visit Nice, his grave is in the lovely small cemetery in the grounds of the Anglican Church).

The writer starts by telling himself to praise God and remember his blessings. 'Count your blessings' might well

have been on his lips! By 'soul', he means all of his being, his inner self and faculties.

It was thought that eagles had very long lives, yet never seemed to show it, hence the reference in verse 5. The same image is used in Isaiah 40:29-31. In today's world in which people are living longer (although no-one can match Methuselah!), and the health challenges of old age are all around us, this is an encouraging thought: *'Those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength'*.

Today's reading is **Genesis 41**

When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream: he was standing by the Nile, when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. After them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the river-bank. And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up.

He fell asleep again and had a second dream: seven ears of corn, healthy and good, were growing on a single stalk. After them, seven other ears of corn sprouted - thin and scorched by the east wind. The thin ears of corn swallowed up the seven healthy, full ears. Then Pharaoh woke up; it had been a dream.

In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him.

Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, 'Today I am reminded of my shortcomings. Pharaoh was once angry with his servants, and he imprisoned me and the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard.'

Each of us had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. Now a young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream. And things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was impaled.'

So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.'

'I cannot do it,' Joseph replied to Pharaoh, 'but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.' Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile, when out of the river there came up seven cows, fat and sleek, and they grazed among the reeds. After them, seven other cows came up - scrawny and very ugly and lean. I had never seen such ugly cows in all the land of Egypt. The lean, ugly cows ate up the seven fat cows that came up first. But even after they ate them, no one could tell that they had done so; they looked just as ugly as before. Then I woke up.

'In my dream I saw seven ears of corn, full and good, growing on a single stalk. After them, seven other ears sprouted - withered and thin and scorched by the east wind. The thin ears of corn swallowed up the seven good ears. I told this to the magicians, but none of them could explain it to me.'

Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, 'The dreams of

Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears of corn are seven years; it is one and the same dream. The seven lean, ugly cows that came up afterwards are seven years, and so are the seven worthless ears of corn scorched by the east wind: they are seven years of famine.

'It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do. Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land. The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the famine that follows it will be so severe. The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.

'And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine.'

The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. So Pharaoh asked them, 'Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?' Then Pharaoh

said to Joseph, 'Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.'

So Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.' Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain round his neck. He made him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and people shouted before him, 'Make way!' Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt.' Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah and gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, to be his wife. And Joseph went throughout the land of Egypt.

Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh's presence and travelled throughout Egypt. During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. In each city he put the food grown in the fields surrounding it. Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure.

Before the years of famine came, two sons

were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, 'It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household.' The second son he named Ephraim and said, 'It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.'

The seven years of abundance in Egypt came to an end, and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in all the other lands, but in the whole land of Egypt there was food. When all Egypt began to feel the famine, the people cried to Pharaoh for food. Then Pharaoh told all the Egyptians, 'Go to Joseph and do what he tells you.'

When the famine had spread over the whole country, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe throughout Egypt. And all the world came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe everywhere.

Here is the chapter read by David Suchet:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/audio/suchet/nivuk/Gen.41>

Joseph had his own dreams, which he explained to his family and that landed him in a pit. Then he explained the dreams of his fellow-prisoners, and he continued to wallow in jail. Now the Pharaoh - the most powerful person the world - has dreams, and only Joseph can explain them. His moment has come! The magicians and 'wise men' of Egypt were stumped, but Joseph knew what the 7 plump ears of corn and cattle, and the 7 thin ones, meant. And he doesn't step back from telling Pharaoh that the interpretation has come from God.

Joseph is even bold enough to tell Pharaoh to appoint a discerning and wise person to be in charge for the next 7 years: was he writing his own job description?

In any case, Pharaoh take the hint, and now Joseph is hailed as god-like by the crowds, for saving the day. The description of the honours lavished on him remind us of another 'prodigal son'. But did he not think of his own family in all this, who would be driven to starvation when the famine came? 'Spoiler alert - in the next chapter, God uses even that to bring them back together again.

Prayer *from the Church of Scotland*

Holy trinity, I come to You as Your child.

Not hesitant, not fearful, but full of giddy expectation of what I will learn from You today,
what fun we will have journeying together.

I run to You like a chick seeking shelter under Your wings,
comfort me with Your tenderness,
nourish me with what I need to grow strong
and protect me with Your fierce love.

I have come here today to worship You with my sisters
and brothers in Christ.

You made me to praise You, may my whole life be a song
of adoration.

Thank You for all the building blocks You used to make me
who I am. Thank You for my past. Thank you for what I
learnt.

Thank You for Your daily provision - for my now.

Thank You for the peace I receive through knowing You
and the moments of joy in my life.

Thank You for my future hope.

Thank You for the gift of works to do for You here on earth and the promise of eternal life.

Thank You for all I inherit because You have adopted me as Your child.

Help me to inhabit my inheritance.

Help me live out my identity in Christ for all to see.

Lord you ask us to pray to You.

I know that You see all, know all, so what would be the point in keeping back any thoughts or feelings?

Help me pour them all out to You.

Lord, I pray for everyone I know who has lost a positive self-image, for those who loathe themselves, hurt themselves, starve themselves, drug themselves.

I pray for all those who stay in places and with people who wound them.

Holy Spirit help these people know who they are in You - beloved, forgiven, restored. Help me to help them.

Lord I pray for a church that has lost a positive self-image. I pray for Your people who see themselves as defeated, irrelevant, weak.

Holy Spirit help Your church believe that it is still the bride of Christ - radiant, spotless, holy.

Help me to be a hot coal of enthusiasm and a spring of positive action.

Lord I pray for a planet that is bruised and bleeding.

Help us restore Your creation as the extension of Your glorious and holy self that it is.

Let me understand the responsibilities of stewardship You gave us Your people.

Let me view loving Your world as an outpouring of homage to You, our creator.

Let my choices be part of my daily worship.
Help me protect this inheritance for future generations.
Lord I pray for the redemption of society.
When I think about the damaging cultures I see all
around me I am angry and sad.
Help me make a stand for Your ways in this world.
Help me be a force for good, working hard to see Your
kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.
Make me an ambassador for inclusion and a bringer of
justice, a carrier of forgiveness and a maker of peace.
May I be a voice for the silenced and a defender of the
weak. Help me be a doer of righteousness.
Let my prayer be counted as incense before You
and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice.
Amen