

Blessed are you, Lord God of our salvation,
to you be praise and glory for ever.
As once you ransomed your people from Egypt
and led them to freedom in the promised land,
so now you have delivered us from the dominion of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of your risen Son.
May we, the first fruits of your new creation,
rejoice in this new day you have made,
and praise you for your mighty acts.

This "simple" prayer was for the rogation days, last week.

The word blessing cannot really be translated - is it wishing something well, or wishing happiness, goodness or protection? It could be calling down favour from God, or asking God to look closely at a particular thing, or for something to be redeemed or bring joy? So wide a meaning and hard to define! And then this happens - we bless the Lord! How could we offer anything to him? And yet its there in the Bible (Psalm 103 and other places). We give whatever we have in our hearts and souls - praise, gratitude, adoration - and we give it God.

Because he is the God who saves - the God of salvation. Not just us, individually, but he saves nations, and he saves the world. And if there are other worlds in the universe, then he has saved them too, because its in his nature, its who he is.

So we praise and give him glory for ever.

Prayers frequently recount times in the past when God has done things - they remind God of what he has done and how committed he is to us, and remind us too of what he's capable of, which increases our faith. So this lovely prayer talks of God buying back, ransoming, the Israelites when they were slaves, and that key moment of Exodus - from slavery to freedom. And it draws a parallel to what Jesus did on the cross. How his death, on a different passover, took us from slavery to freedom. Our slavery was different - we were in the dominion of darkness - it could be our minds are unenlightened, or we are groping in darkness for a meaning to life and way forward, or we could be more physically trapped by some power of darkness and evil. Yet Jesus victory over death, his resurrection, brings us into a place of freedom and light - the kingdom. And Jesus spoke so much about the kingdom yet we often are so poor at grasping what it means. The kingdom is here and now, not waiting for us yonder. The kingdom is practical and real, not spiritual and aesthetic.

And then, having declared what God did in the past, and what he has done now, come the request. That we might rejoice in this new day. And it gives us the title - the first fruits of creation - and that could refer to the Genesis story that humans are the pinnacle of creation, or the idea of a harvest offering - giving the first fruits to God, or that those living in the kingdom we are the first ones of nature to be redeemed and given this new life.

This is the new day that God has given us - and even here there are echoes of coming out of darkness and into light, coming from sleep into wakefulness, and death into life. What played out with the Israelites and the Egyptians, with Jesus and the tomb, and in us, happens every single day - a new start, a new beginning.

No wonder when we think of these things - and watch the sun rising - we praise God for all that he has done. We are the creatures, he is the creator. We may question and puzzle, we may sometimes be angry or afraid, but in the end, all we can do is be in awe and wonder at the God who made us, saved us, and sustains us.