Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king’s son. It is a prayer for justice as God sees it, not as the sovereign sees it. James Montgomery’s hymn, “All Hail to God’s Anointed,” imagines Jesus as the psalm’s focus:

All hail to God’s anointed, great David’s greater Son!
All hail in time appointed, your reign on earth begun.*

But the psalm’s prayer for an earthly ruler is potent in these days. What if king were president? At this writing, on this side of the election, it is a “not yet” prayer. This devotion book will be in our hands, however, on the “already” side: the leader, the prayer unchanged.

You shall come down like showers upon the fruitful earth; and love, joy, hope, like flowers, spring in your path to birth.

Advent is a tension of already and not yet—what is glimpsed and what is awaited. The second line above points us to the tension. The path before us does not always seem to bloom but to choke. The despairingly recurrent deception, clutter, aggression, and waste that clog our screens and our souls. Who will be our refuge and strength? The psalm may extol the king in many ways, but it places trust in the work of God alone. The already-not yet is captured in a shorter song lyric—this refrain from an African American spiritual:

Done made my vow to the Lord and I won’t turn back:
I will go, I shall go, to see what the end will be.

The vow is made “to the Lord,” not to one another. It is God’s vision of justice and righteousness that sustains when our own vision, our own seemingly clear agendas, our own human strength fail, as they inevitably will.

To you shall prayer unceasing and daily vows ascend.
Your rule is still increasing; your rule is without end.

The psalm ends, as it begins, with its sights set firmly on God’s work: “Blessed be the Lord... who alone does wondrous things.” That vision becomes almost ecstatic at the psalm’s conclusion: “Blessed be his glorious name forever; may his glory fill the whole earth.” Montgomery’s hymn, in one deft line of poetry, captures this: your [already established] rule is [because not yet fully accomplished] still increasing. What is our part in that increasing? To whom is our vow made?

Gracious God, to you alone belong all glory and power. Set our sights and watchfulness on you. May our trust be in you alone, so that our prayers and actions will point to you, our strength and redeemer. Amen.

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* Hear the Austin Seminary choir sing this hymn:
AustinSeminary.edu/Advent16