

Praise: Pointing to the stars

**Blessed be God who animates our lives and offers us the opportunity to sing and dance praise to the creator and redeemer of our lives.
AMEN**

Throughout Eastertide we listen to stories of revelation and the risen Christ. We listen to stories of new recognition of God in our lives now that we have known Resurrection.

And while these stories are marvelous and inspirational, we might also need to pay attention to our response to Easter and the Paschal Mystery. We might need to ask ourselves who are we now, now that our hearts are burning, now that we gaze into a tomorrow in God's time when ALL will be gathered up into a heavenly city?

These last two Sundays, I have been struck by what the lectionary gives us in the way of informing this response by way of the psalms. We don't often pay attention to them, we did with Psalm 23, and also today I would like to shine a light on psalms 148 and 67.

If Psalm 23 is Good Shepherd Sunday's psalm then this Sunday, and last, are Praise the Lord Sunday psalms.

The Psalms are our Response to the Readings, the psalms are there to meet all aspects of our life and identity: joy, sorrow, lament, ecstasy, wonder, love and praise.

Today I would like us to focus on the Praise part. For Praise ought to be our response to the God of abundant grace. Praise changes us. Praise turns our lives and our responses into blessing, just as praise becomes Aaron's blessing in Psalm 67: May the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious unto you, may the lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace!

We might take some time this morning to be more intentional about praise and take notice of how it changes us! and forms us into a blessed community on whom God shines!

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Ralph Waldo Emerson once asked: what would we do if the stars came out only once every thousand years? No one would sleep that night of course, assuming we all noticed...

The world would become religious overnight we would be ecstatic, delirious, made rapturous by the glory of God.. instead the stars come out every night and we watch tv. (paul hawken)

This caught me up short. This question caused me to consider the call to wonder love and praise which is at the heart of Christian faith. at the heart really of religion which after all means to re ligament

Praising God means we take nothing of the wonder of creation for granted

Praising God articulates the wonder the love and the gratitude inherent in our lives every single day

Praising God connects us to the whole, the unity, the cosmos infused with divine light

the psalmist today and last week seems to know that the better part of wisdom is that praise opens an artery, a life giving channel, filled with the love of God and that is glory, of the divine type.

Perhaps an ordinary story will reveal this extraordinary truth.

There was once a young violinist, a virtuoso, a star! Her technical skill was unsurpassed! She became the first violin for a renowned orchestra!

A new conductor was hired and at the first rehearsal of Brahms violin concerto in D, he stopped the playing several times, more than usual, and it was irritating to the members especially the first violinist.

Finally, on behalf of the whole orchestra, she confronted the conductor? Why do you keep stopping? it is all technically correct!

He paused and calmly responded: It is not beautiful and glorious!

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**She was puzzled having never heard this as the standard:
What do we need to do to please you?**

**Play for the glory of God! Make your instruments sing with praise!
It has nothing to do with technique and only to do with freedom and
release and gratitude!**

**we are all that first violinist...or the cellist or the oboist or the
tympanist**

**we all are challenged too often with having achieved some kind of
technical perfection or proficiency only to realize something is
missing.**

**we all too often assume that being praised for our achievements,
being rewarded for them, will make everything ok only to realize that
something still feels hollow and unfulfilled.**

**And we all may have had moments when something transports us out
of our huddled hunkered down selves and into a holy realm of love
and light and freedom.**

I am thinking praise is that transporter!

**and the reason praise is of ultimate importance now as we approach
the Ascension of Jesus and the responsibility which comes at
Pentecost to be the Church, is that the question throughout Easter is
how are we going to be now that Jesus has come, how are we going
to wait for the second coming, how are we going to be Kingdom
bearers?**

**The answer is in getting outside ourselves and in joining with the
multitudes to praise the Creator redeemer and sanctifier.**

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this week and last week's lections are about praise, specifically praise of God, and its relationship to the Glory of God.

These readings taken together remind us of the recovered Alleluia, Praise the Lord, Glory be to God, which has come back into our lives with Easter joy.

These readings speak to the praise which is good and right and a joyful thing AND when genuinely directed to the Divine somehow connects us to the divine and to each other. Somehow makes possible the love we are newly commanded to show.

The hymns this week which mirror last week, were chosen with Sherry's assistance to illuminate and give voice to Praising God. (In fact, you will notice that three were taken from the section of the Hymnal so named) They, like the psalms, are our responses to The Word of God.

One of the closing phrases upon reading Scripture is Hear what the God is saying to the Churches...

Hear what God is saying to us...

Last week and this week God is saying open yourselves to sing and dance and praise and something will happen, something will align,

Halleluia! Praise Him

ALL creatures, not just human but monsters and seas and animals

Halleulia! Praise the Lord! Amen

Hymns like psalms start flooding my head! All Creatures of our God and King

Praise my soul the King of Heaven; Praise him for his grace and favor...

Glorious in extolling glory

we become glorious when we extol glory...

According to Walter Brueggemann, The psalter is composed of three kinds of psalms: Those of orientation, those of disorientation, and those of reorientation.

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Psalms of orientation speak of things like creation, wisdom, and the favor of God. An example would be Psalm 8 -

“

**I look up at Your heavens, shaped by your fingers, at the moon and the stars you set firm – what are human beings that you spare a thought for them, or the child of Adam that you care for him?
— (v.3-4, New Jerusalem Bible)**

Psalms of disorientation speak of struggle and lament

An example would be Psalm 13 –

“

**How long, Yahweh, will you forget me? For ever? How long will you turn your face away from me?
— (v.1, New Jerusalem Bible)**

Psalms of reorientation speak to a realignment a religamenting of our lives as we seek God’s help in our disorientaiton...

Psalms 67 and 148 are psalms of reorientation. They call us to remember all salvation history that we might realign our hearts and prayers to the wondrous acts of God. They call us to take our place in the stream of God’s mercy and grace.

They call us to get outside ourselves and turn toward the light

They call all creatures without discrimination to do so.

Praise, Alleluia and Doxology are theological terms which are related.

We praise God to give glory and to touch glory

Alleluia means praise the Lord: we miss it during Lent and rejoice when it returns on Easter

And Doxology is a hymn or liturgical offering Praise AND Giving Glory to God

We lift our hearts and eyes and arms to God in the doxology after the offering and before the Eucharistic prayer to REORIENT ourselves and to be open to the burning desire to be touched and kindled by God’s love and grace.

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**Words and gesture are important. In worship we spend a great deal of time repeating beautiful and acutely crafted words
And let us not forget the gesture, the motions, the personal piety.
We would not turn our eyes to the ground to thank another human being. We ought with God to lift our gaze and open our hearts to proclaim...proclaim the goodness of the Lord!**

I close with a story which was one of the most surreal and inspiring in my life...and occurred while I was an associate at St David's

**While there we were blessed by the offering of David Kim, the first violinist of the Philadelphia Orchestra one Sunday. His musical offering was the sermon. It was exquisite and sublime and certainly met the new conductor's desire for beauty and glory.
After he finished, after that numinous silence, just before everyone who wanted to applaud and stand did so...he took his bow raised his eyes, and pointed to the sky, to the overhanging cross, to the sublime as if to say to God be the glory!**

There is a humility in this which is more than joy and freedom. as the hymn says, more than liberty. There is an authenticity to this gesture which simply aligns with the divine.

**Johann Sebastian Bach said All music should have no other end and aim than the glory of God and the soul's refreshment; where this is not remembered there is no real music but only a devilish hub bub!
He began every composition with JJ meaning Jesus help me and ended them with SDG Soli Dei Gratia To God alone be the glory.**

just imagine if everything we did began and ended with giving glory to our Creator! Just imagine that doing so allows us to heed Jesus new commandment to love one another...Just imagine the blessing which shines upon us when we do...

On this Memorial Day weekend when we honor those who have given their lives for our nation, let us bless them and locate them in the

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Kingdom of God's love and grace, where we are all gathered together and held in mercy.

I invite you to practice praise. With words certainly, but even more with gesture. If you were the God who loves us, created us, cares for us, and forgives us, what would you appreciate. Reach and turn and gaze with devotion and of course, praise! Lift the bows of the instruments which play the music of your lives and point to the stars as though to say Praise and Honor and Glory be yours our God

Nothing then will hinder your relationship with God; nothing will hinder your attainment of glory divine, all love's excelling...joy of heaven to earth come down.