

HALLELUJAH! PRAISE THE LORD!

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

A farmer was selling his horse. He placed an ad in the paper and soon a buyer came calling. The buyer didn't know anything about horses, but he looked the horse over and decided the price was right for such a fine animal. The farmer was a very religious man. He explained to the gentleman that the horse only responded to biblical commands. To make the horse go the command was "Praise the Lord!" The command to make the horse stop was "Hallelujah!" The man handed the farmer the money, loaded the horse in the van, and drove away.

The next day the man took his new horse to the mountains to ride. He got on the horse and shouted, "Giddyup." The horse just stood there. "Giddyup!" he shouted, but the horse just stood there. Then the man remembered what the farmer had told him and he shouted, "Praise the Lord!" The horse responded by moving in a light trot up the trail. "Praise the Lord!" said the man and the horse picked up the pace. Amazed by this, the man said one more time, "Praise the Lord". The horse proceeded to run in full gallop. The man suddenly noticed that his new steed was fast approaching a cliff with a hundred-foot drop-off. "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" shouted the man. The horse slid to a stop just inches from the edge of the cliff. The man looked down over the edge of the cliff, then raised his eyes to heaven, sighed with relief, and proclaimed, "Praise the Lord!"

Singing "Hallelujah!" should certainly get us going! "Praise the Lord!" is our heartfelt response to the awesome God who created everything there is.

As I read Psalm 148 this morning, maybe you were reminded of another Bible story:

* Then God said, "Let there be light" and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.

[We might as well follow the example of this morning's psalm, which invites **everything** in all of creation to say "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!" So, let's try it as we remember the creation story. On the prompt "Let all God's people say . . ." we respond "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!"]

* God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. Let all God's people say . . . "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!"

* And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." And it was so. God called the dome Sky. Let all God's people say . . . "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!"

* And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. Let all God’s people say . . . “Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!”

* Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. And God saw that it was good. Let all God’s people say . . . “Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!”

* And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. God made the two great lights — the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night — and the stars. And God saw that it was good. Let all God’s people say . . . “Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!”

* And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” Let all God’s people say . . . “Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!”

* And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. And God saw that it was good. Let all God’s people say . . . “Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!”

* Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image. God blessed them. And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. Let all God’s people say . . . “Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!”

I hope the word gets out that we Presbyterians said “Hallelujah!” and “Praise the Lord!” in worship today! Look at the margin note next to the sermon title in today’s bulletin. St. Augustine, one of the most influential early Christian leaders and theologians, said, “A Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot!” Someone called me this week after reading and talking about Psalm 148 and said, “I think the first question and answer of the catechism says it all. Q: What is the chief and highest end of man? A: Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.¹

But it’s not just us singing and saying (can we go so far as to **shout?**) “Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!” It’s **everything in all creation!** Angels, the heavenly host, sun, moon, shining stars, highest heavens, the waters above the heavens, sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind, mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, creeping things and flying birds, kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth, young men and women, old and young together!

Twelve times in Psalm 148 all creation is invited and instructed to “Praise the Lord!” and to sing “Hallelujah!” Why? “For he commanded and they were created. He

established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed. For his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven. He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him.” (Psalm 148:5-6, 13-14)

On March 13, 2013, Jorge Mario Bergoglio got a new name — “Francis.” As the conclave of cardinals met to count the votes for the new Pope, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio was comforted by his friend, the Brazilian Cardinal Claudio Hummes. When Cardinal Bergoglio received the necessary number of votes to be elected Pope, Cardinal Hummes hugged and kissed him and said, “Don’t forget the poor.” Three days after he was elected Pope, Francis told thousands of journalists he had chosen “to be called after St. Francis of Assisi, ‘the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation,’ the same created world ‘with which we don’t have such a good relationship.’”²

Our second hymn this morning, “All Creatures of Our God and King,” is sometimes called “The Canticle of the Sun.” It is based on a poem by St. Francis of Assisi in the 13th century. The footnote in our hymnal, *Glory to God*, says, “This cosmic roll call allows human beings to give voice to all creation.”

Here is St. Francis’ original hymn, which he said he wished to compose for God’s praise, “a new hymn about the Lord’s creatures, of which we make daily use, without which we cannot live, and with which the human race greatly offends its Creator.”³

Most high, all powerful, all good Lord!

All praise is Yours, all glory, all honor, and all blessing.

To You, alone, Most High, do they belong.

No mortal lips are worthy to pronounce Your name.

Be praised, my Lord, through all Your creatures,
especially through my lord Brother Sun,
who brings the day; and You give light through him.
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor!

Of You, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars;
in the heavens You have made them bright, precious and beautiful.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,
and clouds and storms, and all the weather,
through which You give Your creatures sustenance.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Water;
she is very useful, and humble, and precious, and pure.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You brighten the night.
He is beautiful and cheerful, and powerful and strong.

Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Mother Earth,
who feeds us and rules us,
and produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Be praised, my Lord, through those who forgive for love of You;
through those who endure sickness and trial.

Happy those who endure in peace,
for by You, Most High, they will be crowned.

Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Bodily Death,
from whose embrace no living person can escape.

Woe to those who die in mortal sin!
Happy those she finds doing Your most holy will.
The second death can do no harm to them.

Praise and bless my Lord, and give thanks,
and serve Him with great humility.

As Psalm 148 echoes the story of creation in Genesis 1 & 2, we humans are included in the long list of God's creatures and creations that are called to sing "Hallelujah!" and "Praise the Lord!" Here is a wonderful comment about St. Francis of Assisi's hymn to the Creator of us all: "This magnificent hymn expresses the mystical vision of the Saint of Assisi and, since it springs from the depths of his soul, provides us with many insights into the profundity of his life of faith in the Triune God, Who so deeply enters into creation. In this vision, however, the Little Poor Man does not lose himself in space or in the vastness of the created world. He becomes so intimate and familiar with the wonders of creation that he embraces them as 'Brother' and 'Sister,' that is, members of one family."⁴

On this fifth Sunday of Easter, just one month after our celebration of the Good News that God raised Jesus from the dead, we hear Psalm 148 calling us to join our voices with all of creation to sing "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!" The vastness and beauty of God's creation inspires us, overwhelms us, leaves us in awe, spurs us to say "Praise the Lord!"

And in this Easter season, we continue to celebrate the beginning of the new creation that God brings about in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. We celebrate Christ's victory over sin and death. We celebrate that because Jesus was "obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross — God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:8-11)

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Let all God's people say . . . Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!

Let us pray: Hallelujah! Let us praise the Lord! Let us give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. Hallelujah! Let us praise the Lord! Let us give thanks to the Lord with our whole heart. Hallelujah! Let us praise the Lord! Let us praise the name of the Lord! Amen.

NOTES

¹Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 1.

²Cindy Wooden, "Pope Francis Explains Why He Chose St. Francis of Assisi's Name," *Catholic News Service*, March 18, 2013.

Found at www.thecatholictelegraph.com.

³"The Canticle of Brother Sun," at www.franciscanfriarstor.com.

⁴Ibid.