

Colossians 3:16-17

Psalm 150

August 31, 2014

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

A Summer in the Psalms

PRAISE THE LORD!

WHO? WHAT? WHERE? WHY? HOW? AND WHEN?

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.

Praise the Lord!

*Praise God in the sanctuary of the Wallace Presbyterian Church;
praise him in his marvelous creation
(at Camp Kirkwood, by the lake)!*

*Praise God for what he has done —
he created all there is;
he made covenant with us;
he redeemed us in Jesus Christ;
he sends his Holy Spirit;
he loves us!*

*Praise God according to his exceeding greatness —
God is so much greater than what we can imagine.
Look at the world around us.
Consider your salvation.
There is no God like God!*

*Praise him with all kinds of music!
Praise him with the handbells!
Praise him with beautiful choral anthems!
Praise him with piano/organ duets by Karla and Vera!
Praise him with jazzy versions of “Jesus Loves Me”!
Praise him with praise songs from Montreat!
Praise him with guitars on Youth Sunday!
Praise him with Pepper Choplin songs!
Let everything — EVERYTHING —
praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord!*

For the past two Sundays, I have invited you to hear the “old” words of the psalms with “new” ears through “new” words. That was my paraphrase of Psalm 150 which I wrote on October 14, 2008. As we come to the end of “A Summer in the Psalms,” there isn’t a more appropriate psalm to hear this morning.

Each Sunday before we come into the sanctuary, the choir and I have a prayer together. We gather by the door in the music room in the midst of the last minute rush to get robes on and to make sure the stoles are the right color and put on straight. In my prayer I try to remember to thank God for the new day, for the chance to worship him in this place, for the privilege of being worship leaders at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, and for the gift of music that the choir brings to our worship every Sunday.

A framed print hangs right next to where I stand on Sunday mornings when I offer the prayer. Written in beautiful calligraphy are these words from a German opera house:

*Bach gave us God’s Word.
Mozart gave us God’s laughter.
Beethoven gave us God’s fire.
God gave us Music
that we might pray without words.*

The book of Psalms as a whole is a hymnbook, a book of praises. The last five psalms begin and end with “Praise the Lord!” Psalm 150 isn’t subtle at all about what we’re called to do: “Praise the Lord! Praise God! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!” Hallelujah times 13! Hallelujah means “Praise the Lord!” In fact, the Hebrew name for what we call “The Book of Psalms” is *Tehillim*, which means “praises.”

As we have discovered during our “Summer in the Psalms,” there are plenty of laments and cries and doubts and questions in the psalms: How long, O Lord? Where are you, God? This is the pits, O Lord. Have you forgotten to be gracious, O God? So, it might seem a bit arbitrary or even naive to end the entire book of Psalms with five songs of praise, the last one with “Praise the Lord!” thirteen times. However, listen to what Eugene Peterson says about how the book of Psalms ends with “Praise the Lord!”:

“This is not a ‘word of praise’ slapped onto whatever mess we are in at the moment. This crafted conclusion of the Psalms tells us that our prayers are going to end in praise, but that it is also going to take awhile. Don’t rush it. It may take years, decades even, before certain prayers arrive at the hallelujahs . . . Not every prayer is capped off with praise. In fact most prayers, if the Psalter is a true guide, are not. But prayer, a praying life, finally becomes praise. Prayer is always reaching towards praise and will finally arrive there. If we persist in prayer, laugh and cry, doubt and believe, struggle and dance and then struggle again, we will surely end up at Psalm 150, on our feet, applauding, ‘Encore! Encore!’”¹

The organ pipes have “stops” or knobs on the organ console. Vera and Karla can control the volume of the organ by pulling out or pushing in the “stops.” So, when they “pull out all the stops,” they really crank up the volume and the praise. Psalm 150 “pulls out all the stops” in its call to “Praise the Lord!” You can imagine the music director leading the symphony and choir to a crescendo of sound and praise — the trumpets, the lutes and harps, the tambourines, the strings and pipes, and the loud, clashing cymbals. People are dancing — people are singing — the music is sounding — and the call to worship, to “Praise the Lord!” goes out. The call to worship goes out, not just to Israel, not just to human beings on the earth, but to **everything that has breath**: “Hal-lelujah! Praise the Lord!”

But, why? Why should we “Praise the Lord!”?

In 1902, the British author, Rudyard Kipling, published the *Just So Stories for Little Children*. The fantasy stories are about the origins of things, especially how animals were formed (“How the Whale Got His Throat,” “How the Camel Got His Hump,” “How the Rhinoceros Got His Skin”). Kipling begins his story, “The Elephant’s Child/How the Elephant Got His Trunk,” with this little poem:

*I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who*

When I gave Cheryl today’s bulletin information on Wednesday, I told her, “Don’t panic when you see the sermon title! You don’t have to put all of that on the signboard out front. Just put ‘Praise the Lord!’”

Who? What? Where? Why? How? When? These six basic questions for information-gathering help us get the complete story. What if we apply them to Psalm 150?

Who? Praise the Lord!

What? Praise the Lord!

Where? Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty firmament!

Why? Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his surpassing greatness!

How? Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with clanging cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!

When? The psalm doesn’t specifically designate a time (notice it doesn’t say, “Praise the Lord only from 11 a.m. to 12 noon, and no longer, on a Sunday morning!”). But the psalm does suggest that we should praise the Lord all the time, in everything we do, with everything we are.

Back to Who? again: Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

In the next few weeks, you will have the opportunity to purchase copies of the new Presbyterian hymnal, *Glory to God*, in honor of or in memory of special people. On Sunday, October 26, we will retire the blue *Presbyterian Hymnal* and give thanks to God for how that collection of songs has helped us praise the Lord. We will dedicate the new hymnal and begin to learn how to use all of its resources as we praise the Lord.

In the Introduction to *Glory to God*, the members of the Presbyterian Committee on Congregational Song write:

This we know:

We know this hymnal will change lives.

We know this hymnal will inspire the church.

We know these songs will enliven worship in powerful ways.

We know the familiar songs will sing anew.

We know the new songs will speak truth.

This we pray:

We pray that as we sing together from this hymnal, we will come to have a deeper sense of our unity in the body of Christ.

We pray that the Holy Spirit will bring surprises and breathe new life into our churches through this hymnal.

This we hope:

We hope the cover imprint fades from greasy fingers.

We hope the pages become wrinkled and torn from constant use.

We hope our children will sing from this hymnal — we hope our grandchildren will too.

We praise!

We praise God for this resource of song and give God the glory!²

*When in our music God is glorified,
And adoration leaves no room for pride,
It is as though the whole creation cried: Alleluia!
How often, making music, we have found
A new dimension in the world of sound,
As worship moved us to a more profound Alleluia!
So has the church, in liturgy and song,
In faith and love, through centuries of wrong,
Borne witness to the truth in every tongue: Alleluia!
Let every instrument be tuned for praise!
Let all rejoice who have a voice to raise!
And may God give us faith to sing always: Alleluia!*

Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Let us pray: Gracious and loving God, help us to praise you with every ounce of our being. May our praise ring forth on the drums, the bass, on the piano and the guitar. But most importantly, may the praises of our lips be drawn from the depths of our hearts. We thank you that you are a God who has called us out of the wilderness and into the promised land of salvation. You are faithful, O God, you are faithful. May we be a people who live faithfully before you in the land of promise. Amen.

NOTES

¹Eugene Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (Harper and Row, 1989), p. 127.

²*Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), pp. v-vi.