

**WRITING OUR OWN EASTER PSALM**

***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.***

Eight years ago today, I wrote the first of eleven psalm paraphrases. A friend and mentor suggested I try my hand at personalizing some psalms as a spiritual discipline. The paraphrases aren't just words that are different from those of the psalmists. Instead, they are prayers to God modeled on particular psalms but reflecting the circumstances of my own life.

I'd like to share two of them with you this morning. The first paraphrased psalm is based on the last psalm in the Old Testament, Psalm 150, and is dated October 14, 2008.

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 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!

I wrote the second paraphrase of Psalm 111 on October 16, 2008.

Praise the Lord!  
I love to worship the Lord with my whole heart  
with the congregation of the Wallace Presbyterian Church  
(but sometimes my heart is distracted, O Lord,  
and I am anxious and preoccupied).  
The Lord's works are amazing.  
Many take great pleasure in them,  
as they look at a newborn baby, the oceans and the mountains,  
a spider's web, and a honeycomb;  
when they consider what God has shown us in his Son.  
Your works, O Lord, are more marvelous than anything we can imagine.  
Yet, they only reflect and reveal what is even more marvelous —  
your righteousness, grace, and mercy.  
I remember your wonderful works and am glad.  
You always remember your covenant with us,  
even though we break it again and again.  
The history of your people — and my own life —  
is full of your works, faithful and just.  
I can trust in your Word and promises.  
Your Word never fails.  
You act with faithfulness and uprightness, and call me to do the same.  
Forgive me, Lord, when I do not act that way.  
You redeemed us in Jesus Christ!  
You established a new covenant in his blood.  
Thank you, Lord.  
Your name is great!  
I want to know you, Lord, even as you know me.  
I want to love you with my whole being.  
I pray for your wisdom, O Lord, and for an upright heart.  
Praise the Lord forever!

The book of Psalms is a collection of prayers and songs that is sometimes called "Israel's hymnbook." The very name — Psalms — is taken from a Greek word that means "song." The Hebrew title of the book is *Tehillim*, which means "hymns" or "songs of praise."

Presbyterians have been called "a singing people." For 200 years in Presbyterian churches, the psalms were sung by using the "lining out" method. Here is the explanation of that method from *The Directory for Public Worship*: "That the whole congrega-

tion may join herein, every one that can read is to have a psalm book; and all others, not disabled by age or otherwise, are to be exhorted to learn to read. But for the present, where many in the congregation cannot read, it is convenient that the minister, or some other fit person appointed by him and the other ruling officers, do read the psalm, line by line, before the singing thereof.”

For 200 years, the Church of Scotland sang only psalms from the Bible. In 1861, the church formally approved the singing of hymns; that is, songs based on scripture but not actually found *in* the Bible. Earlier in the 19th century, Rev. R. William Ritchie of St. Andrew’s Church in Glasgow tried to introduce an organ in his church. The Presbytery of Glasgow took a dim view of Rev. Ritchie’s musical efforts and proclaimed that “the use of organs in the public worship of God is contrary to the law of the land and constitution of our Established Church.”

Around the time when the Church of Scotland approved the singing of hymns, Rev. Robert Lee introduced a harmonium (a small keyboard with pipes that make sounds when air passes through them when the player presses keys) into worship at the Greyfriars Kirk in Edinburgh. He had to defend the use of instruments in worship before the General Assembly in 1864. That group declared that “such innovations should only be put down when they interfered with the peace of the Church and harmony of congregations.” The next year the Greyfriars Kirk installed a pipe organ.<sup>1</sup>

In the Introduction to our (relatively) new hymnbook, *Glory to God*, the members of the hymnal committee write, “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. We praise God for this resource of song and give God the glory!”

Our current “Directory for Worship” affirms that “Song is a response which engages the whole self in prayer. The covenant people have always used the gift of song to offer prayer. Psalms were created to be sung by the faithful as their response to God. In addition to psalms the Church in the New Testament sang hymns and spiritual songs. The Word is also proclaimed through song in anthems and solos based on scriptural texts, in cantatas and oratorios which tell the biblical story, in psalms and canticles, and in hymns, spirituals, and spiritual songs which present the truth of the biblical faith. Song in worship may also express the response of the people to the Word . . .”<sup>2</sup>

You would hardly expect to find the name of Jesus in any of the Psalms. After all, some of them were written as much as 1,000 years before he was born in Bethlehem. A couple of centuries before Christ, the Hebrew Scriptures (what we call the Old Testament) were translated into the common and widely used Greek language. This translation is called the Septuagint, and is probably the version of the Old Testament that many of the New Testament writers quoted from.

In my study Bible, the notes above Psalm 66 say, “To the leader. A Song. A Psalm.” Some folks in the early church added another heading to Psalm 66: “For the end, a Song of a Psalm of resurrection.” You can read Psalm 66 over and over again, and you will never find the first mention of Jesus and his resurrection from the dead.

However, the psalmist does praise God and say “you have brought us out to a spacious place” or “a place of abundance.” (v. 12) The early Christians continued the theme of praising God for his awesome deed in raising Jesus from the dead.

Psalm 66 calls all the earth, all the peoples to make a joyful noise, to come and see what God has done, to let the sound of his praise be heard. It’s reason enough to praise God simply because he is God. But the psalmist gets more specific — “he turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot; we went through fire and through water.” In other words, God’s people praise God because of what God has already done for them. And, because they sing God’s praises for what God has already done for them, they are reminded to praise God for what God is still doing for them, AND they can trust that God will always be there for them — “Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me.”

My voice therapist asked me if I had been singing recently and I said, “All the time — not very well, but all the time!” Aren’t we enormously blessed with the music here at the Wallace Presbyterian Church? Karla, Vera, the chancel choir, the handbell choir, the soloists, the guest musicians all help us make a joyful noise to God, to sing the glory of his name, to give to him glorious praise, because of his awesome deeds, because of his great power, because he has kept us among the living, because he has brought us out to a spacious place, because God has listened and not rejected our prayer, because God has not removed his steadfast love from us.

So let’s write our own Easter psalm. You should have a piece of paper in your bulletin this morning.

Grab a pew Bible (share with your neighbor if you need to) and turn to Psalm 66. Look at the end of v. 12 — “yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.”

The writer of Psalm 66 has named some of God’s awesome deeds that give God’s people plenty of reason to make a joyful noise and to sing the glory of his name.

Let’s add our own reasons for making a joyful noise to God and singing the glory of his name.

On your piece of paper, write down an awesome deed of God in the world or in your life.

I’m going to ask anyone who wants to share to do so. After the person reads God’s awesome deed, we will all respond, “O God, how awesome are your deeds!” It’ll be kind of like lining out the psalms in the old Scottish kirk!

[Give time for folks to do this and to share some of God’s awesome deeds.]

Here’s the most awesome deed of all: “O God, you loved the world so much that you gave your only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

Let all of God’s people say, “O God, how awesome are your deeds!”

***Let us pray: O God, we praise your holy name, for you have done awesome things in our lives and in our world. Inspire us this day, O God. With the power of your Holy Spirit, revive our courage. With Christ's holy calling in our lives, rekindle our sense of purpose. With your steadfast love and faithfulness, renew our faith. In gratitude and faith, we pray. Amen.***

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>“Presbyterian worship,” at [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org).

<sup>2</sup>*Book of Order 2015-2017*, W-2.1003, “Music as Prayer: Congregational Song,” (p. 87) and W-2.2008, “Other Forms of Proclamation,” (p. 89)