

**Act 2:37-47**

**Ephesians 5:15-20**

**August 15, 2021**

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

**TO THE SAINTS IN WALLACE  
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.***

To the saints who are in Wallace and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

A cowboy was looking to buy a horse. He answered an ad in the paper and was surprised when he ended up at a church. The preacher met him out front where a fine horse was grazing on the church lawn. The cowboy immediately made an offer. But the preacher said, "Before I sell you this horse, you need to know that he is a very religious horse. Also, he doesn't respond to 'Giddyup!' and 'Whoa!' If you want him to run, just shout 'Praise the Lord!' To make him stop, yell 'Hallelujah!'" As the cowboy paid the preacher, he mumbled, "Praise the Lord! — Hallelujah! Got it . . ."

The next day the cowboy went out riding on an unfamiliar stretch of land. He soon came upon some majestic mountains that took his breath away and he shouted, "Praise the Lord!" Immediately, the horse took off at a tremendous gallop and the cowboy was hanging on for dear life. To his horror, he saw they were headed directly toward a 200 foot drop-off. Forgetting the preacher's instructions, the cowboy panicked and shouted, "Whoa, boy! Whoa!" but the horse just kept on racing toward the cliff. At the last minute, the cowboy remembered and yelled "Hallelujah!" at the top of his lungs and the horse screeched to a stop just inches from the edge. The cowboy was shaking all over and when he finally got his breath under control, he looked up to heaven and said, "Whew! That was a close one! Praise the Lord!"

Hallelujah! means Praise the Lord! So, whenever you read "Hallelujah!" you can say "Praise the Lord!" such as in many of the psalms: "Praise the Lord, O my soul! Hallelujah! How good it is to sing praises to our God! Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song!" or the most wonderful Psalm 150, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah in his sanctuary; hallelujah in his mighty firmament! Hallelujah for his mighty deeds; hallelujah for his surpassing greatness! Hallelujah with trumpet sound; hallelujah with lute and harp! Hallelujah with tambourine and dance; hallelujah with strings and pipe! Hallelujah with clanging cymbals; hallelujah with loud clashing cymbals! Let everything that breathes Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, some synonyms for Hallelujah are hurrah, hot dog, whee, whoopee, and yippee. That certainly makes for a different version of the psalms, doesn't it? "Hurrah to the Lord, O my soul! Hot dog to the Lord! Whoopee to the Lord! Yippee to the Lord!" Maybe not . . .

. . . but the sentiment is the same. This is how the apostle Paul expresses it: "be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among your-

selves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 5:19-20) What a wonderful description of God’s people giving thanks and praising the Lord — “Hallelujahing!” if you will. It sounds a lot like Luke’s picture of the first believers who had their lives turned around when they confessed their sins and received the gift of the Holy Spirit: “Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.” (Acts 2:46-47a)

As Paul continues to give instructions about how to live as God’s people — how to live a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called — he urges us to “Be careful then how you live.” He then draws three distinct contrasts: (1) Not as unwise people but as wise; (2) Not as foolish people, but folks who understand what the will of the Lord is; and (3) Don’t get drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit. In that last instruction, Paul may have had in mind not having too much to drink, but he could also have meant, “Watch out for anything that will dull your senses to what God is doing in your life and in the world, for that will only draw you away from God’s ways.” Instead, Paul says, “be filled with the Spirit” and, when you are, you will find yourself living a life full of praise and thanksgiving, a life full of “Hallelujahing!” Paul says something very similar in his letter to the Colossian Christians: “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.” (Colossians 3:17) In other words, as we have heard in other places in Ephesians and in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, Paul is talking about a way of life, an orientation toward God that guides everything we do. He is talking about a life full of praise and thanksgiving.

G.K. Chesterton, the early 20th century British writer and lay theologian, wrote, “When it comes to life, the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude.” That’s something of a restatement of what the 4th century Bishop of Milan Ambrose said, “No duty is more urgent than that of returning thanks.” And both of those thoughts reminded me of an article I read years ago on the last page of an issue of *Southern Living* magazine, about the pig under the oak tree. Although I couldn’t find the reprint of that particular article, I did find what is probably the original, a poetic fable by the famous 19th century Russian writer Ivan Andreyevich Krylov, called “A Hog Under an Oak.”

*A Hog under a mighty Oak  
Had glutted tons of tasty acorns, then, supine,  
Napped in its shade; but when awoke,  
He, with persistence and the snoot of real swine,  
The giant’s roots began to undermine.*

*“The tree is hurt when they’re exposed,”  
A Raven on a branch arose.  
“It may dry up and perish — don’t you care?”*

*“Not in the least!” The Hog raised up its head.  
“Why would the prospect make me scared?  
The tree is useless; be it dead  
Two hundred fifty years, I won’t regret a second.  
Nutritious acorns — only that’s what’s reckoned.”*

*“Ungrateful pig!” The tree exclaimed with scorn.  
“Had you been fit to turn your mug around  
You’d have a chance to figure out  
Where your beloved fruit is born.”*

The story in *Southern Living* warns, “Don’t be like the hog, who never stops to look up to see where the acorns come from and to give thanks.”

That’s why we sing in worship or, as our final hymn today puts it, “No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that Rock I’m clinging. Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?” We sing to lift up our heads and our hearts and give thanks to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And we have been blessed in the Presbyterian Church with our “new” (published in 2013) *Glory to God* hymnal. Perhaps you’ve never thought about the importance of praising God with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord in our hearts. In an early review of the “new” hymnal, Gary Panetta wrote, “We are beset by challenges of our own . . . wrenching divisions within the church; widespread ignorance of Christian teaching and practice; empty spiritualities that fail to satisfy; and shaken faith in human progress. All of these are symptoms of a single ill: We are more preoccupied with ourselves, and our own efforts, than with God.”

Did you know our hymnal is divided into three major sections under the title “Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs”? They are: God’s Mighty Acts; The Church at Worship; and Our Response to God. Again, from the review, “To sing these hymns in order is to sing the story of salvation — and to pray and respond to God’s invitation to join in the mission of redemption. The hymnal reminds us that we are a people of mission and that mission is not about us. It’s about God. And this God loves the world.” He ends his review with this call: “ ‘Glory to God’ may look like just another hymnal. But it is not. This hymnal is a call to the stories of God’s mighty acts — for refreshment, reorientation and renewal. It is a call to turn our hearts to God.”<sup>1</sup>

When Nancy and I served as co-pastors of the Stanley White Presbyterian Church in Roanoke Rapids, NC in the late 1980’s and through the 1990’s, I sang in the small choir. There were about eight of us and we only sang every once in a while. I sang in the bass section on the back row, between Carlton and Bruce. By his own admission, Carlton did not have a very good singing voice and really couldn’t follow the notes. But Carlton would always say, “I may not be able to sing very well, but like the psalm says, ‘Make a joyful noise unto the Lord.’ I’m joyful and I’m making noise!”

St. Augustine, the important 4th/5th century Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, said, “A Christian should be an Alleluia from head to toe, the praise of God saturating

our lives!” That’s a good one-line commentary on Paul’s instructions in Ephesians about how to live as followers and children of God. And, really, it runs deeper than just this individual action or that particular behavior from time to time. “Praise the Lord!” is offered as a life orientation at all times and in all circumstances.

After all, when you think about it, since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, how can we keep from singing?

***Let us pray: Praise the Lord, O my soul! Lord, may we praise you as long as we live. May we sing praise to you, our God, all our life long. May we sing to you, O Lord, with thanksgiving. Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Hallelujah! Amen.***

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Gary Panetta, “Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal,” April 21, 2014 in *The Presbyterian Outlook* at [www.pres-outlook.org](http://www.pres-outlook.org).