

Y'all Praise the Lord
Psalm 150
April 11, 2010

Praise the Lord!

Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heaven!

Praise him for his mighty works; praise his unequalled greatness!

On this second Sunday of Easter the praises surrounding the resurrection still echo in the sanctuary! To them we add the Hallelujah chorus of Psalm 150.

This last of the psalms is a doxology – an expression of praise to God. Each of the last five psalms begins and ends with the phrase, “Praise the Lord.” In Hebrew this phrase is the word, *hallelujah*. To be precise, *hallelu* is the plural imperative of the verb *hallel* – to praise. The word *jah* is shorthand for the personal name of God, Yahweh. So to put it all together in Southern speech form it would be, “Y’all praise Yahweh.” (or Y’all praise the Lord.)

As you think about the psalter (book of psalms) do you think it’s odd that a book of praises contains so much sorrow and lament? Psalms is actually organized into five books or sections – the first of which (Psalms 1-14) is composed mostly of laments. For example:

*O Lord, don't rebuke me in your anger
or discipline me in your rage.*

Have compassion on me, Lord, for I am weak.

Heal me, Lord, for my bones are in agony.

I am sick at heart.

How long, O Lord, until you restore me? (Psalm 6:1-3)

Even Jesus’ words of lament from the cross come from the psalms: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Psalm 22) However, laments are not the whole story in our relationship with God. In this midst of these expressions of heartache, praises burst forth. More and more, as the book of psalms progresses, laments occur less and less and praise for the Lord occurs more and more.

Eugene Peterson writes of this movement of the Psalter, particularly focusing on the last 5 psalms:

This is not a word of praise slapped on to 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 may take a while. Don’t rush it. It may take years, even decades, before certain prayers arrive at hallelujahs. Not every prayer is capped off with praise. In fact, most prayers, if the psalms are a true guide, are not. But prayer, a praying life, finally becomes praise. Prayer is always reaching toward 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!”

This is not only the movement of a life of prayer, it is the movement of the Christian life. During Holy Week, as a community we move from the highest lament of Good Friday to the highest praises we have to offer on Easter – Resurrection Day! The rejoicing of Easter does not negate (or make irrelevant) the laments of Good Friday. If anything our rejoicing is made even more real, more hearty, because we have passed through the valley of the shadow of death. Easter hallelujahs are sung most profoundly by those who have known the sorrows of Good Friday times.

Even the Old Testament prophets understood the power of praise that is born out of hard times. Take Habakkuk for instance. All through the book he laments to God over the problems that are allowed to befall him and his people. Yet at the end of his crying out, we find these words:

*Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food; ...
Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.
The lord God is my strength;
He will make my feet like a deer's feet,
And he will make me walk on high hills.*

These days are filled with all kinds of reason to lament, even in our own church community – unemployment, friends who are preparing to move because of a job transfer, cancer in a 2-year old, chronic illness in adults, brokenness in marriages and in relationships, disappointments of all flavors. If we look, we can always find something to lament.

However, I want to encourage you this morning to wrap up your laments in songs and prayers of praise to the Lord your God! Thomas was invited to place his hands in the nails marks of Jesus. And instead of lamenting the death of his rabbi – crying that Jesus could not be with them in the same way anymore, Thomas proclaimed powerful words of praise, “My Lord and my God!” The death had not gone away, it had been subsumed into the resurrection. Thomas became a resurrection person. The victorious power of God began to transform him and inform how he lived his life and how he viewed the tragedies that he would experience.

My prayer for each of you today is that as you encounter the ugly, hard times of life, you will allow Christ to redeem those experiences and turn them into victories. Allow the Holy Spirit transform you into a person who lives in the power of the resurrection every minute of every day.

Then you can proclaim with the psalmist:
Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heaven!
Praise him for his mighty works;
praise his unequalled greatness!
Praise him with a blast of the ram's horn;
praise him with the lyre and harp!
Praise him with the tambourine and dancing;
praise him with strings and flutes!
Praise him with a clash of cymbals;
praise him with loud clanging cymbals.
Let everything that breathes sing praises to the Lord!
Praise the Lord!