

Scripture: Psalm 150:1-6
Message: Praise the Lord!
August 27, 2017; Bethel CRC, Brockville, ON
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The book of Psalms is a collection of writing that speaks to our hurts and joys, our doubts and our trust, to our desperate cries and our overwhelming thanks. The whole range of life experiences are addressed or identified in some way in different psalms. It is not just a book about past history. It speaks to our present experience and emotions.

Through all of that range of human experience, one thread that weaves its way through all the psalms is trust in the faithful presence and care of God. Even when the world around us, or our own world, seems to be falling apart, we hear the repeated refrain in the psalms that God is a solid rock and refuge in whom we can trust.

That may be what inspires the psalmist to conclude this collection with such a vibrant psalm. What do you say at the end of a collected testimony to God's power, to God's faithfulness in helping people in need, a testimony of trust placed in God who answers prayer? What do you say at the end of a collection of psalms directed to a great and powerful and just and merciful and kind God?

Praise the Lord! Hallelu-jah! Praise to Yahweh! The word for praise, *hallelu*, is repeated 13 times in these 6 verses. Praise to God! Give the Lord glory and honour! Do it over and over and forever!

This is not a scattered, let-the-tongue-fly sort of mumbo-jumbo of praise. There is a clear order of 4 simple parts in this psalm. Verse 1 says **where** to praise the Lord. Verse 2 says **why** praise the Lord. Verses 3,4,5 speak of **how** to praise the Lord. And verse 6 says **who** should praise the Lord.

WHERE? "Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens." God is praised both on earth and in heaven. The Lord our God is King of heaven and earth. Already now the angels are praising God in heaven. When we get to heaven we will also praise him there--forever.

What that means is that when we gather for worship on Sunday morning, we are actually entering into worship that is already taking place. We do not initiate worship. This praise that the Psalmist describes does not start with us.

Have you ever walked late into a worship service? People are already singing and praying. We might enter somewhat cautiously, with sensitivity to what is already going on. We enter into the experience of what is already in progress, trying not to interrupt it.

In a way that happens every time we gather together for worship. Whenever we engage in worship, including our time of congregational worship, we are engaging in a

heavenly activity. We participate with those who dwell above, taking up a theme that is already begun before God's throne in heaven, adding our voices to theirs.

While God is praised in his mighty heavens, he is also praised in his sanctuary, this earth. The beauty of creation, warm sunshine from a clear blue sky, numberless stars flickering across a dark sky at night, a partial solar eclipse, birds singing of their joy to be alive, gives praise to God!

That praise continues as we come into this place, this sanctuary, for worship services. Our purpose in coming here is to praise God with our singing and giving. We praise God in prayer. We praise God by listening to his Word as it is read and preached. We praise God in our dedication to serve him.

But our praise is not enough if we only go through the motions. We can sit in church, sing and pray and give and listen, but not be praising God. Our actions must be sincere, coming from our hearts. In our singing, we pay attention to the words and sing them because that is what we want to say. Our giving and listening is not done simply as a routine thing, but stems from a desire in our hearts to honour God and praise God in this sanctuary.

Another word for sanctuary is temple. When Jesus is our Saviour, then our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. God lives in us. And so also in our bodies, in our lives, we must praise God. Everything that we do, every activity that we participate in, every place where we go, must be an expression of praise to God. Our worship on Sunday continues through every day of the week.

WHY? What is the reason or motivation for such all-encompassing praise? Verse 2 gives two reasons: "Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness."

These acts of power reveal the greatness of God. We see his power in the act of creation. God has made, and cares for, this magnificent and majestic universe.

God's acts of power are also seen in his acts of the salvation of his people. Different psalms tell the stories of God's power in delivering his people, whether from Egypt or from other enemies. We know that act of power in the salvation of all people through Jesus Christ.

God made his power known through the raising of Jesus from the dead, to overcome the power of sin and death. Because of that saving act of power, we are assured of forgiveness of sins and eternal life for all who believe in Jesus as Saviour and follow him as Lord. Praise God for *this* act of his power!

The first reason to praise God is for *what he does*, his acts of power. The second reason is to praise God for *who he is*, his surpassing greatness. God is infinitely great. He is all-wise, all-knowing, everywhere present. There is no limit to his being or power. God is great, beyond the limits of our knowledge.

As we come to know God more and more, it inspires our praise. We can never praise God enough. We praise him to the utmost of our abilities to try to acknowledge and respond to his greatness. Again, this praise is not limited to a 60 minute service on Sunday, but is expressed in all of our lives.

When we consider the creation, or the greatness of God's love to his people, how can we say nothing? Anyone who believes and trusts in God, who has experienced that power and greatness in their lives, will burst forth in praise!

HOW? In the next 3 verses we are told how this praise to God can be expressed. A list of 8 instruments is given with dancing at the centre of the list. When we look at the types of instruments, we find a wonderful instruction in how to praise God.

This list includes instruments used in special religious ceremonies as well as everyday, ordinary instruments. Praise to God can be done in special times of worship or ceremony, as well as in the ordinary routine of life. We can praise God in church, and while doing chores or mowing lawn or vacuuming the house.

The list includes both loud and soft instruments, both sweet-sounding ones, and ones that clash. In this list we find wind instruments (trumpet, flute), string instruments (harp, lyre), and percussion (tambourine, cymbals). Different parts of the body are needed to play these instruments. So we could say that all parts of the body join in praise.

Everyone and everything is part of giving praise to God. You do not have to have a perfect voice or the ability to sing perfect harmony. Special training or experience is not required. There is no need to hold a special office. Anyone who knows God can praise God. Everyone's praise is welcomed and appreciated by God.

Also, when we hear this list of instruments, we realize that worship is bigger than our personal preferences. We have different ideas about music and instruments that are acceptable for worship. Some of our differences come from our upbringing or personal taste or being familiar with certain instruments. Or we prefer a particular style of music, one that connects to our faith journey. But tastes can change and vary between different people.

In his book *Resounding Truth*, author Jeremy Begbie writes, "When we hear music, a whole range of elements are pulled together—our state of mind and body, memories and associations, social and cultural conventions, and other perceptions that come along with the musical sounds. Together, these greatly affect the meaning the music will have for us."

This means that the music we hear will affect us on every level. It affects us our nerves and bodies; it affects us on an aesthetic level; it affects us emotionally. So when someone says, "I just can't worship to that music," it's probably true.

But the Psalmist's description is also telling us something else. His listing of the variety of musical instruments and styles and methods that can be used to worship God might go

beyond our own personal taste. It is very possible that I would not enjoy every instrument the Psalmist includes in his list. It is very likely that the particular style of music which inspired the psalmist would sound foreign to my ears. We can expect that not everyone will appreciate the worship style or instruments or expression of everyone else.

This Psalm reminds us that it's not about *my* style or preference in worship. It's not about pleasing *me* or even trying to please everybody. We are called to do our best to praise God by every means possible. Praise him with the music we like, but God is also praised with the music we don't like. Praise him with the instruments we love, but accept that he is also praised with the instruments we don't love. Even more, admit that God accepts such praise. *I* don't have to like it; *God* does.

In the centre of this list we find dancing. This seems out of place in a list of instruments. But actually it reinforces what we just said. Dancing also involves the whole body, not just our breath to blow a trumpet or our fingers to stroke a harp. The instruments which are used involve different parts of the body. Dancing climaxes that in using the entire body at once to give a clear expression of glory and adoration and praise to our God and Saviour. Let everyone in their own unique way—as a resounding trumpet or gentle flute or quiet harp or clashing cymbal or in dance, praise the Lord!

WHO? verse 6: "Let everything that has breath praise the LORD." That doesn't leave much out. Every living thing receives its breath from God and so they must use it to praise their God.

This reinforces the message of the previous 3 verses. Those verses list instruments which are used to praise God. But those instruments by themselves are lifeless, useless. By themselves they just quietly lay there. They need someone who is alive and has breath to pick them up and make music with them.

It is living things, who have received life from God, who praise the Lord. The crown of all living things is the people whom God has made. We praise God our Creator. We praise God our Saviour. He not only gives us physical life; he also gives us spiritual life. In Jesus Christ we are born again, we are given a new life. We daily live by God's grace. In response we praise God.

Where? Everywhere. Why? Because of his power and greatness. How? In any and every possible way. Who? Everyone who has breath. Let your life be filled with praise.

To God be the glory!

Amen.