

Praise Ye The Lord©**Psalm 148, Is 55:12, Eph 1:3, Rom 11:36****Dr. Sharlyn DeHaven Gates****June 7, 2015**

These last few weeks, as you probably have noticed, I've been gone more than I've been around. The last couple of weeks, I was on vacation in Kansas, visiting my sons and grandchildren.

But, I went at that particular time because I was asked to officiate at the wedding of a young woman whom I had gotten very close to while serving as pastor in Kansas.

The wedding was being planned for almost 2 years and it was an outdoor wedding in a beautiful seeing. Problem was it poured down rain. We ended up in the tent they set up for the reception.

It thundered so loud I had to use a mic and the lightening was so frightening, I was a little afraid that I might just go up in smoke. And the bride almost had a melt down just before the wedding because all her plans were almost ruined.

Note that word *almost*. Instead of lamenting and crying out: "Why now, God?" She turned it around and joyfully gave thanks for the wedding day finally arriving and especially for the time that had come to marry her true love. Her near lamenting became a hallelujah.

And she danced with joyful abandon on the slippery, muddy platform in the tent.

The first week of May, I was gone to Alabama to a very special seminar on the Psalms. It was titled *Praying the Psalms; Psalms for Life*.

One of the conference speakers was Roberta Bondi, who is an author, a teacher and a very fun speaker who says that the Psalms are our family's prayer book. That is our faith family – the Family of God. The psalms are our connection with believers all over the world. They express the various occasion in our lives: joy, lament, difficulty, anger, praise.

Don Saliers, the other speaker at the seminar, calls the psalms the NFL of Prayer!

One of my favorite authors – Anne Lamott – says that there are three forms of prayer: "Wow! Help! Thanks!"

This morning I want us to focus on the "WOW" form of prayer. Actually, most all of the psalms in all five books, end with a doxa, a praise to God. Even those psalm that begin with lamenting, or with anger and asking for retribution towards enemies – most all of them end by praising God, by recognizing that God is still God no matter what the situation, and that is reason enough to praise!

But some of the psalms – like the one we are going to read today in Psalm 148 – are all praise. In fact, the psalmist proclaims that all creation praises the Lord – the angels, the sun and moon and stars, the fire and hail, the sea monsters, – all praise the Lord. It reminds me of that song *“Praise ye the Lord, Hallelujah! Everybody praise the Lord!”*

Teach Song and read Psalm 148

The last five psalms are actually called Hallel psalms. The word Hallel in Hebrew means “praise.” Hallelujah, means praise. When we sing the song “Halle, Halle, Halle!” We are actually saying, over and over: “Praise the Lord!”

Much of the psalms were written for, and used, for worship. They would be sung by the community of faith as they made their pilgrimage to Jerusalem and to the holy temple. Going to Jerusalem – the city of God and the temple – the place where God dwelled was the most joyous thing for the Hebrew people.

In every worship service we sing our Hallel. We either sing “Glory be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost” – praise to the God, the three in One; the blessed Trinity...

Or, we often sing “Halle, Halle, Hallelujah” – praising God with joyful voices! Even our bodies get into the praise as many of us clap our hands and move a little in time with that African tune.

We almost always sing a praise hymn for the first hymn of the day. And usually the sending hymn is also a song of praise.

And of course, we sing the Doxology – Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Praise Him all creatures here below. Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts. Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost!”

What do you feel when you’re singing those songs of praise – those “Hallel” songs to God? Are you feeling the deep, resounding joy and the sheer reverence for God? Someone described that reverence as something that is spontaneous, that wells up inside of us and just has to come out.

It’s been described as when we look at something that suddenly takes our breath away because of it’s surprise, it’s stunning beauty. It’s like that thing causes you to genuinely exclaim without even thinking. It’s that “Oh my God!” kind of moment.

I had one of those moments flying home from that seminar. I was sitting on the plane by the window, reading a book. But I suddenly looked up and out the window and what I saw in the clouds made me catch my breath. I’m always seeing different shapes and

objects in the clouds, but this time I saw a large angel, lying on his side, head on a cloud pillow, wings sticking out gracefully, body and legs extended on the bed of clouds.

I took a picture but by the time I had my phone turned on and booted up we were a little ways off and I had to take the picture from a different angle. I can still make it out but it's not as clear as was it to me when I first saw it.

Our faith involves all the human senses that we have, doesn't it? The things we see; the way we hear the Word of God in so many ways and places; the way our bodies get involved with moving and touching and dancing. At the table, we taste the bread of heaven and the cup of salvation. We smell the yeast in the bread.

At our seminar, we were in the same room for our discussion that we would be going back to for worship, right after a brief break. All the time we were having discussion we were subconsciously aware of the smell of breaking bread.

But when we came back into the room, the smell permeated every corner of the room; the room was filled with the smell of freshly baked bread. And we were about to take communion. While we were having our discussion, the bread was baking right there in our room in a breadmaker! I was so ready for the Eucharist every single evening!

Our faith involves our senses. Faith really cannot be contained by words alone. There is so much more than just words!

And yet – do you agree that we often tend to just go through the motions? We sing the Doxology with a weariness, at times. Maybe we are thinking it's too slow, or too usual, or maybe some think it's being sung too fast.

Are we really praising God from the depths of our being? I mean, we have just heard the Word of God – we hear that we are forgiven and that we are given new life in Christ; we hear the Word spoken in Scripture and in the preaching of that Scripture. We hear the Good News of God's love for us and for the world. We hear that God is still being God – still creating, still loving, caring, healing, guiding.

What more would it take for us to truly, spontaneously jump up from our pews and sing at the top of our voices "Praise God from whom all blessings flow!"

Talula Bankhead was known to say: "My dear, there is so much less here than meets the eye."

Let us, who have been so blessed and so loved, never be less than what meets the eye. I mean, if we are singing praise to God, let's sing with all our hearts and souls praise to God. If we are singing Hallelujah! Let sing it with enthusiasm and let's let out some of the spontaneity and joy that surely resides deep down inside of us.

Don Salliers said, “Everyone has a Magnificat that is repressed.”

Let’s let it out! Let us join our voices and our hearts, our whole selves in praising God with Mary and Zachariah, with Simeon and all the angels.

Isaiah 55:12 says

For you shall go out in joy,
 and be led back in peace;
 the mountains and the hills before you
 shall burst into song,
 and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Let us remember when it rains on our biggest days, the bride’s psalm of lament that turns into hallelujah as she dances with her beloved.

Our lives are full of so many events – the ups and downs of life. From birth to the grave, our emotions join with our faith to write our own psalms.

I love the words in the commendation at the funeral service for a loved one. “All of us go down to the grave, but even at the grave we sing our song: Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!” In our grieving, it may be a broken Hallelujah, but it is Hallelujah all the same.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places ... Ephesians 1:3

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen. Romans 11:36

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