

Word Matters

6th Weekend of Kingdomtide – July 15/16, 2006

Sermon Background Study

*Psalm 150 (NRSV)*¹

¹Praise the LORD!

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

²Praise him for his mighty deeds;
praise him according to his surpassing greatness!

³Praise him with trumpet sound;
praise him with lute and harp!

⁴Praise him with tambourine and dance;
praise him with strings and pipe!

⁵Praise him with clanging cymbals;
praise him with loud clashing cymbals!

⁶Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD!

Last week we talked about the risk of under-reading Scripture. Today, we'll look at how we sometimes tend to shrink the God-words, even a simple word like "praise."

Preachers and Bible teachers struggle with vocabulary, Christian vocabulary. It isn't that we don't know what the words mean (or at least have our own opinions about their meaning), it's just that we fear being not understood at all or, probably worse, being misunderstood. How do we speak of God and the things of God (theology, that is) to someone who never, rarely, or superficially attends a worship service, or who has never cracked a Bible or been a part of a class? How do we speak in the same sermon or lecture to someone who is only now seeking God and to someone who is a lifelong disciple of our Lord.

Some Christian vocabulary is obviously challenging. Long-used and much-needed words like "atonement," "justification," "sanctification," and many others are often avoided rather than taught. Still other so-called "church" words like "baptism," "salvation," and "repentance" are used even though many of us might have trouble telling someone what they really mean, at least so far as the body of Christ has long used these words.

But a third category of Christian vocabulary is actually the trickiest of all. These are the words that we hear in worship and in class that we think we know, but we really don't. "Love" is a good example. Get into a conversation with the average person on the street about love and you are quickly going to be talking about feelings. But in the Christian vocabulary, the best synonym for love is sacrifice. Love is about caring and serving. Love is about what we do, not what we feel. When Jesus says "love your enemies," he is not so naïve as to think that we will have loving feelings toward them. Instead, Jesus calls us to care for and behave toward our enemies as we would our friends and families.

Today's Scripture brings us to another word that we think we know but probably don't ~ "praise." Merriam-Webster's offers up a definition that probably works for most people: "praise – an expression of approval." We might praise a co-worker who has done a great job or a movie actor for a powerful performance or even a preacher for a well-delivered sermon. Thus, we think that when we speak of praising God, we are speaking or singing our approval of God. God is great. God is the best. God is awesome. And so on.

This is good so far as it goes, but it actually doesn't get us too far. When the writer of today's ancient psalm wrote or sung, "Praise the LORD!"² he had far more on his heart. Merriam-Webster's has a second definition that gets us closer – to praise is to glorify. Of course, we are then left wondering what "glorify" really means, though it seems pretty clear that it is more than simply expressing approval.

¹You might also read Psalm 148, which is another enthusiastic call to praise. Since Psalm 150 is the last one in the Psalter, you might also go back and read Psalm 1. You'll see that the placement of the psalms is not an accident.

²In the Hebrew, this line is *Hallelu Yah*. "Hallelu" transliterates the Hebrew word for praise. "Yah" denotes the name of God, YHWH, sometimes pronounced Yahweh.

J. Clinton McCann writes, "Praise is the offering of one's whole life and self to God."³ This is far more than an expression of approval or even gratitude. It is far more than a song we might sing or anything we might do in worship. To praise God is to orient our entire life around God. It is to place God at the center of our universe, with ourselves revolving around our Lord. It is to yield to God every moment of every day in all things. It is to submit our will to God's will. It is to acknowledge our dependence upon God – in all things. There can be no part of our lives that is not God's. It is God who is the Master, sovereign over his creation. All this meaning is carried by the seemingly simple word "praise."

To glorify God is to add yet another dimension. In the ancient world, "glory" was a social term. When it was applied to humans in the OT, it was used to show their significance to the world. God's glory is his visible presence. Glory is not a private word, it is a public word. To glorify God is to show the world that God is creator, redeemer, and Lord of all that is. Thus, God's glory is revealed in Jesus. When we behold Christ, we behold God. God's glory is revealed in Jesus' miracles, for they proclaim God's work. Similarly, we glorify God with our lives when we live in such a way that God's work can be seen in us.

Now that we've reflected on the meaning of "praise," let's take a look at what the psalmist has to say.

Who is to be praised? (v. 1)

The psalmist could not be more straightforward. It is YHWH, the Lord God Almighty, who is to be praised. As Christians, we proclaim that YHWH is eternally Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – personal, social, one.

Why is God to be praised? (v. 2)

God is to be praised "for his mighty deeds." This is key to understanding God, the biblical view, and Christianity. The God we glorify and proclaim to the world is the God-Who-Acts. Ours is not a proclamation of philosophies or ideas but of what God has done, is doing, and will do. God creates. God redeems. God sustains. God loves. In all this, God is revealed by his actions, by his mighty deeds. And the deed that reveals the truth about God like no other is Jesus' faithfulness to his vocation all the

The Problem with Praise Songs

So-called "praise songs" and "praise music" are a very popular genre of Christian worship music. I have many of these songs on my iPod and you may even see me singing along at the top of my lungs as I tool down the tollway. (If you do, please don't tell me.) As with all music genres, I find many of these songs to be mediocre and not improved by endless repetition. Similarly, we are probably lucky that most of Charles Wesley's reputed 6,000 hymns are not in our hymnal.

The problem I want to talk about is not with the music itself or even the fact these songs tend to be theology-free. The problem is that we now have a category of music that we call "praise music," thereby making all other music not praise music. It is a bit as if we had a portion of our worship service we called "praise time" before turning to other matters.

But all of our worship music praises God. It is all sung and played to the glory of God. Indeed, all of our worship is to praise God, to glorify God. "Worship" derives from "worth-ship." It means giving God all that God is worth – and that is beyond even our imagining.

way to a cross outside Jerusalem, this loving sacrifice of the Father's son for the sake of the whole world. It is by his deeds that God has revealed to us not only his existence but his character.

How is God to be praised? (v. 3-5)

As we've seen, praise involves every aspect of our life and being. In these verses, the focus is on worship in the temple. There is lots of music (seemingly pretty loud!) and dance. Exuberance might be the right word. Joy and happiness and excitement pouring out. Praise bursting forth. Who could contain it? Indeed, the music is so wonderful and so glorifying that we wonder what could possibly top it – but the psalmist is about to tell us.

Who is to offer the praise? (v. 6)

What can top the temple's orchestra? Only the voices of every creature singing out the praise of God. God breathed life into creation and now God's creatures use that very breath to praise God. McCann writes, "Against this backdrop, Psalm 150 proclaims that the proper goal of every creature is praise – life shaped by God's claim and lived under God's rule. As Mays⁴ puts it, 'No other use of breath could be more right and true to life than praise of the LORD. No other sound could better speak the gratitude of life than praise of the LORD.'"

Hallelu Yah!! – Praise the LORD!!

³from his commentary on Psalm 150 in *The New Interpreter's Bible*. A copy of this commentary set is in the St. Andrew library.

⁴quoted by McCann from James Mays' commentary, *Psalms*, in the Interpretation series, John Knox, 1994.

Thru the Bible Daily Bible Readings

July 16 – July 22

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help.

Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Day 1 1 Chronicles 18-20; Song of Songs 2 David's kingdom; David at war</p>	<p>Day 2 1 Chronicles 21-23; Song of Songs 3 the story of the census is retold – Who incites David to take the census in this account?</p>
<p>Day 3 1 Chronicles 24-26; Song of Songs 4 Lists of the temple priests, musicians, tribal leaders, and so on. Why would the Chronicler include such lists?</p>	<p>Day 4 1 Chronicles 27-29; Song of Songs 5 Solomon builds the temple</p>
<p>Day 5 Hosea 1-4; Song of Songs 6 Israel has committed adultery by chasing after other gods, so God instructs Hosea to marry a prostitute. God's redeeming love will be revealed. See esp. 2:14-15</p>	<p>Day 6 A day for reflection and catching up</p>
<p>Day 7 Hosea 5-8; Song of Songs 7 God calls for Israel and Judah to turn back to God before they are overwhelmed by the consequences of their apostasy.</p>	

Sermon Notes

Scott's class, *Something More*, meets in Wesley Hall at 9:30 every Sunday.

If you are not a part of a Sunday morning class, we hope that you'll visit our class. It is open to adults of all ages. We have more than ten small groups meeting now and a growing number of opportunities to meet other members of the St. Andrew community. If you are new to St. Andrew or just visiting, the class is a great way to begin getting connected. If you have questions, you are welcome to call Scott Engle at 214-291-8009 or e-mail him at sengle@standrewcccl.org.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. You might begin by talking about what it means to offer our whole life and self to God. What parts are easiest to offer to God? What are the hardest? How might we begin to offer ourselves to God? Do you think it is something that we can do in stages or is it something that one day we simply do? Where will you begin?
2. You might also talk about music. What role does it play in your relationship with God and in your praise of God? What sorts of music help you to connect with the deep emotion of a 100% commitment to God? Much of our theology is carried in our hymns, songs, and poetry. Pick a favorite hymn or two and talk about the spirituality that you think lay behind its writing. Do you think that only music explicitly written as "Christian" is music that praises God? If not, what are hallmarks of music that praises God? And of music that does not? For example, what music gives you a glimpse of the transcendent?
3. Finally, you might reflect on our glorifying of God? What is it about our lives that can bring glory to God? What are some specific ways we could go about bringing glory to God? When have you seen others bring to glory to God? Share some of those stories.