Hi,

Patti and I are back after a good trip to MDAnderson. We are so appreciative of everyone’s prayers. It is such a wondrous thing to be surrounded by so much love and kindness. We are deeply blessed to be part of the St. Andrew family.

* Since, sadly, my Monday and Tuesday classes could not meet this week, my next class will be Sunday at noon, on my Facebook page We are going to begin a new series: *The New Testament in Seven Sentences*.
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org/). All the postings are up-to-date.
* I’ve offered more than fifty movie and book recommendations since beginning this email. Since I doubt any of us have watched and read all fifty (wink, wink), I’m going to start offering new ones when I have something I really want to share with you or someone sends in a recommendation for me to share.

Even the midst of this pandemic, we can never forget to praise our Lord, without whom none of us would even exist, much less thrive. Psalm 150 is one of the great praise songs of the Hebrew Bible. But what really do we mean when we say, “Praise the Lord”?

***Psalm 150 (NRSV)***

**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!**

**7Praise the Lord!**

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!,” 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.

J. Clinton McCann writes, “Praise is the offering of one’s whole life and self to God.” 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 Old Testament, 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 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 Mays 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!!

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott