

SERMON TITLE: "Praise Be to God!"
SERMON TEXT: Psalm 145:1-21
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James
OCCASION: November 10, 2019, at First UMC

INTRODUCTION

When the Wahlen Veterans Home representatives told us that they couldn't come today, that meant that I had to change my plans for the theme of today's worship service. As I pondered what to preach about, what came to my heart and mind was praise to God. As you may be noticing, I felt a desire to sing a lot of praise songs in today's worship service. I guess that's what I've been craving, and maybe you have too.

This need for praise had probably been building up in me because of how busy we've been here this fall. It's true that we Christians often need to hear messages about what we should be doing. That's why, in September, we talked for five weeks about prayer. It's good for us to learn more about the value and methods of such an important spiritual practice. And that's why we also dedicated the past five Sundays to financial stewardship. Giving to God for the future of our ministries in and through this church is an important way we express our faith.

In fact, our dedication and discipline in doing God's good work has been evident in many actions this fall. Our September diaper drive, the Veterans Tribute Run and Craft Bazaar in October, and this month's JENAR mission emphasis and Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes are all indications of our United Methodist belief that we should be doers of the word and not hearers only. Our mission outreach is complemented by the local mission of cleaning and maintaining our church, teaching classes, preparing music, and visiting our shut-ins. Our strong sense of call to help God care for the earth has also spurred us on with our beekeeping ministry and the SWIFTS irrigation project.

As important as all our Christian discipline and activity is, however, Christian faith and life isn't only about what *we do* or what *we ought to do* better. If and when we ever get too deeply in that mode, we find ourselves out of balance and burned out. Sometimes, the best spiritual thing we can do is forget about our responsibilities for a while and allow ourselves the luxury of admiring who and what God is and what God does. So, for a few minutes I don't want you to think about anything that you have to do outside of this hour. Think of this as a time of escape, a spiritual massage, or soothing lotion for your soul. I just want you to bask in the joy of "Praise be to God!"

1—THE LANGUAGE OF PRAISE

Fortunately for us, there are many songs and scriptures that help us find words to express our praise to God. Psalm 145, in particular, admires and honors God's greatness. We feel our own spirits lifted as we read the words *extol, greatly, mighty, glorious, splendor, wondrous, awesome, abundant, and celebrate*. Using the highest language imaginable in the time of the Jewish monarchy, the psalm writer referred to God as a *king*. But God was no human king. Even while trying to bless God's name, the psalmist acknowledged that the majesty of God is *unsearchable*. God is not limited by human mortality either, as praise to God goes on *forever and ever, from one generation . . . to another*.

Just being associated with such a God is enough to raise us up out of the doldrums, strengthen our weak knees, transform our anger into joy, and inspire our hope. As Isaiah 40 says it, God lifts us up on wings like eagles. As Psalm 145 tells it, such an experience of God can't be ignored. It affects us in a powerful way. Like an involuntary expression that just pops out of us, when we're made aware of God's greatness, we can't help but *extol, bless, praise, laud, declare, meditate, proclaim, celebrate, and sing aloud*.

Throughout this week, as I was thinking about this idea of praising God, I recalled the Westminster Catechism, which was written back in 1647. That document, which belongs to the Presbyterians, is written in the format of 196 questions and answers. In that long list, the number one

Q&A indicates that the most important thing we human beings can do, and our primary reason for being, is to glorify and fully enjoy God forever. I suppose a person could hear that as a command or requirement—as another burdensome obligation on our must-do list. But you could also see it as the great wisdom of faithful people over the ages that praising God is the essence of our being and when we are most whole. This is how our masterful creator created us. Just like healthy humans breathe oxygen and drink water, so also we praise God.

2—THE CHARACTER OF PRAISE

As Psalm 145 lifts our spirits by providing us the language of praise, so also it demonstrates to us the character of praise. In verses eight and nine, we see these descriptions of God’s praiseworthy nature. God is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” God is “good to all” and “compassion[ate] . . . over all that [God] has made.” In verses 13 and 14, we see that “the Lord is faithful in all his words and gracious in all his deeds.” God “upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.” In other words, God isn’t praiseworthy just because God is powerful and exalted on high. God is praiseworthy because God is honest and trustworthy. God cares about humanity and all of creation. And God has a character of mercy and compassion. As we see in verses 15-19, God tends to the needs of the hungry and those who cry out for help.

Just as the language of praise lifts our spirits, so do these traits of divine character. As we observe God bending down to lift up those who have fallen, we feel ourselves aligning with God’s character that takes what is low and raises it up on high. Being associated with faithful words, kindness, justice, grace, and mercy brightens our outlook. Think of Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*, and how much his foul disposition and entire life improved when he was miraculously changed by God’s compassion. Just as God’s praiseworthy character traits are what will cause God’s everlasting kingdom to endure throughout all generations, so too will these character traits give us humans the ability to live and praise forever.

CONCLUSION

Yesterday, while I was finishing up this sermon, an orchestra was rehearsing here in our sanctuary. Steve Miller is the director. They're practicing for their annual Messiah Sing-Along at the Ogden Tabernacle on December 8. As the orchestra was rehearsing parts of that familiar oratorio, I felt my own spirit soaring and some goosebumps forming on my arms. I don't know the lyrics to *Messiah* all that well, but when they got to the *Hallelujah Chorus*, I couldn't help but recall the words, "For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" and "he shall reign forever and ever, Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, Hal-le-lu-jah!"

Sometimes we do just need to stop worrying about all that we're doing or that we think we should be doing. It's healthy for us to rest long enough to observe the mighty deeds and character of God. And then, when we do that, it's only natural that our hearts will burst out singing, "Praise be to God!"