

Psalm 148

Praise for God's Universal Glory

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord from the heavens;

 praise him in the heights!

Praise him, all his angels;

 praise him, all his host!

Praise him, sun and moon;

 praise him, all you shining stars!

Praise him, you highest heavens,

 and you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the Lord,

 for he commanded and they were created.

He established them for ever and ever;

 he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

Praise the Lord from the earth,

 you sea monsters and all deeps,

fire and hail, snow and frost,

 stormy wind fulfilling his command!

Mountains and all hills,

 fruit trees and all cedars!

Wild animals and all cattle,

 creeping things and flying birds!

Kings of the earth and all peoples,

 princes and all rulers of the earth!

Young men and women alike,
old and young together!

Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.
He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his faithful,
for the people of Israel who are close to him.

Praise the Lord!

Sermon

If you come over to my house after supper time, well really, anytime, but especially after supper time, all the talk is about animals and nature.

My little girls want to know what God has created. And HOW fun it is to see the world through their eyes – people experiencing a giraffe, or a tree, or puffy clouds for the first time.

Old McDonald had a farm, E-I-E-I-O. And on that farm he had a _____ . With a _____ - _____ here, and a _____ - _____ there, here a _____ , there a _____ , everywhere a _____ - _____ , Old McDonald had a farm, E-I-E-I-O.

We flip through the books of Eric Carle, learning the names of special animals – we meet a fox and his kit, and a seal and her pup, and we can squeal and bark just like them. A long time ago, our neighbor, and Lucy's godmother, Miss Cathy, gave us a book that tells us about all of

the of plants and flowers in our yard – we learn how the bulbs are planted, and warmed in the soil by the sun, and nourished with nutrients and water, and how they grow leaves, and eventually, beautiful flowers of every color – Mommy’s favorites are daffodils. They’re yellow, and they are shaped like little teacups. And we see them every March and April at church, and on the boulevards that line our neighborhood.

Our friend Rebecca gave us a book that sets the lyrics of *What a Wonderful World* against the backdrop of beautiful water-colored images. Trees of green, red roses, too; skies of blue, clouds of white, the bright, blessed day, and the dark sacred night; the colors of the rainbow, also evident in the faces of people passing by; handshakes and hellos, another form of love; babies crying, and growing, and learning; What a wonderful world, a wonderful, connected, vast, creative, expansive world.

And Daddy doesn’t get to say goodnight, until we sing about the things God’s got in His hands or *Her* or *Their* hands (the girls choose their pronouns each evening): baby sisters, and the Paw Patrol, and church buddies, and school buddies, and tomato plants, and ladybugs, and ice cream, and Krispy Kreme doughnuts.

Now, I know I’m not describing anything out of the ordinary for households with young children. But I wish we would reclaim or re-designate such time as sacred and liturgical. I realize that the events I am describing are organic and fluid. But in their own way, my daughters and their peers are acknowledging what’s sacred in their lives: all creation around them. They don’t see God’s creation as something that’s subordinate to them. They see it as this remarkable gift. They are curious about it. They want to know it, and love it, and be a part of it.

But here's the most important part. They aren't yet adults. They haven't spent all this time processing their own experiences, and especially how their experiences are different, or better, or more unique than other beings. Instead, they envision that a tree might dance or think; that a puppy might laugh; that a flamingo might enjoy putting on a dress and a bow; that a squirrel might feel scared, or hurt, or anxious, or sad, or silly, or nervous, or loved, or happy; or that the wind, and the ocean, and the sand might need a hug from their mommy, or a band-aid for their boo-boo. And therefore, it's not a leap for them to believe that other created things, be they plants, animals, or objects, can be loved by God, can be in conversation with God, and can have a purpose to be fulfilled by God.

Today's text is a Psalm about nature and creation. And I think it's written by someone who hasn't lost a partnering relationship with their fellow creatures. This is a communal psalm in every sense of the word, written with the wisdom of a child.

I don't have to explain to my daughters why it's important for us to be psalmists or praise-makers. They just get it. But just in case you need a refresher, here's why praise matters.

When we praise God, I believe that means we do three things: 1) We converse with God, expressing our happiness, our delight, our thanksgiving for being created beings. 2) We acknowledge our purpose – that is to love what God has created – all of creation – by using the gifts that God has given us. 3) We celebrate our connectedness as part of God's creation.

In today's text, the author mentions a collection of 32 parts of creation, all simultaneously praising God, all communicating together. Lemme give you a snapshot:

The conductor raises their baton, and the orchestra includes: sun and moon speaking in tongues of light; waters splashing, oceans tumbling, rivers rushing, fish flapping, whales and walruses bellowing, dolphins squeaking, rain pitter-pattering, winds whistling, mountains and hills adding visual delight with their greens, blues, and purples; flowers and plants adding a sweet aroma; cows mooing, pigs oinking, dogs barking, bees buzzing; kings and princes and everyday Joes singing as best they can....Maybe it's one beautiful congruent note; maybe it's an unbelievable racket, a cacophony of unrivaled disruption, maybe it's all of these things. God dwells in the messy, and in the ordered, in the silence and in the song. But it's a chorus, nonetheless. God's chorus.

And think of all the purpose that is fulfilled in such a gathering: some create heat and light to power a world; some make milk to feed a world; some offer shade; some quench thirst; some are poetry in motion; some offer companionship. All are vital, all love in their own unique way. All have been given purpose by a creator; all have been endowed with unique gifts; all are loved by God, and even better, enjoyed by God.

And what a celebration! This very morning, we gather to sing praises for our God. And just as we are making the turn to verse four of our hymn, the birds, and the crickets, and the wind, the leaves on the branches, the squirrels, and the sweet potato bushes, and whatever else fills our church grounds are joining us. Think about the beauty. Think about the diversity. Think about the creativity. All of this is a gift of God. That's a chorus I want to be a part of!

This kind of praise matters. It does. It really, really does! Such collective, communal praise connects us as human beings – we need to know that whether we are vulnerable or mighty, wise or foolish, young or old, or sitting upon any spectrum of life, we are bound together by a higher, more pure, more real, more true love than we can ever comprehend. And as old-fashioned as it might sound, I don't think we never begin to fully understand our value as children of God, until we hear it out loud, and speak it out loud, and act it out loud – both the giving and receiving.

And then, when such praise, transcends the boundaries of human community, to include all the components of our biosphere, our connection to and our empathy for other created beings is enhanced. And I think that means our world is better protected.

I was flipping channels the other night, and there was a ballerina on stage. She was a psalm in motion. Her muscles all poised and pointed in one direction to create a fleeting moment of pure art and beauty. She'd channeled the gifts of her Creator into an expression of praise for her Creator, and she connected her fellow beings in such an expression. And the world was a better place for such an expression.

And then just yesterday, I drove on Millbrook's campus, and I noticed the most beautiful pine trees. What strength they must have to keep their spines straight, and to hold their branches outright, and to work to make their leaves dance softly in the gentle winds. And to do all of this in such exhausting heat! And it occurred to me that these trees have lived their lives as an expression of praise for their maker, and that my life and yours, too have been enhanced by such an expression.

When I hear today's text, it makes me eager to listen out for the chorus of creation. To find kinship in the myriads of created beings. To praise God in community.

And in just the same way that identifying my human neighbors as God's beloved makes me see them in a new light, the same is true for my non-human neighbors. If they have been created as God's beloved, deemed worthy, and given gifts to share, then I need to be mindful of how my actions, how my words, and how the faith I live out impacts their wellbeing.

Friends, praise has the power to change our perspectives. May we be a community whose praise leads us to care for all whom God has made, and for all who praise God alongside us.

Amen.