

“Let the Whole Creation Cry”

Psalm 148

How often do you want to enlist all of nature and everyone in it to join you in praising the Lord, especially when life becomes downright discouraging?

Maybe New Years weekend is one of those times when we want to join with all of creation to praise the Lord. We want to thank God for a new year.

Psalm 148 is Holy Scripture, but chances are it doesn't fit many occasions in your life except for weekends when families gather, and we have much to be thankful for.

The heading above Psalm 148 in the NRSV says its subject is “Praise for God’s Universal Glory.” Another translation’s heading is even more explicit: “The Whole Creation Invoked to Praise the Lord.” And that’s exactly what Psalm 148 does: It calls upon the sun, moon, stars, mountains, hills, trees, fire, hail, snow, frost, wild and domestic animals, and even sea monsters and angels to join with all people everywhere in expressing high praise for the Lord.

But really, when was the last time something in your life made you want to enlist all nature and everyone everywhere to join you in lauding the Lord loudly? Hopefully there have been a few such times — perhaps with the birth of a child or grandchild, or maybe when you got a good prognosis following treatment for a serious illness — but life is pretty mundane for most of us most of the time. And for some of the time, it’s a downright discouraging struggle.

So, no, Psalm 148, with its over-the-top extolling of the Lord, is probably not the first passage you turn to for daily Bible reading.

But *loud*, of course, is not the only measure of praise. It's not necessary for multitudes to be expressing it for the praise to be heartfelt. Psalm 148 has room for praise softly spoken by even a single individual.

Witness these two true stories. One story is of a wedding, and the other of a funeral.

A pastor was newly called to his first church when a member of the congregation asked him if he would officiate a wedding for the parishioner's nephew, whom the pastor didn't know. The member said the nephew didn't have a church, so the pastor agreed to perform the ceremony.

When he met with the couple in advance to go over the details of the service, he found them to be pleasant people and clearly in love. But when the pastor asked Jody if anyone would be walking her up the aisle — “giving her away” as it was called in those days — she looked sad. “No,” she said. Her father, with whom she'd been very close, didn't approve of Tom because he was older than she was, had been married previously, and had a child she would be helping to raise. Her father was so against the marriage that he not only refused to contribute toward it, he refused to even come.

Jody was a grown-up and had made her own decision to marry Tom, but her father was adamant: he would have nothing to do with the wedding. Later, Tom told the pastor privately that her father's attitude was breaking Jody's heart.

Things went well and the bridal party was supportive at the rehearsal and at the wedding itself. But it seemed to the pastor that there was a note of sadness there in the bride.

He thought about that, especially as she walked up the aisle by herself to the sound of the wedding march. She didn't cry and she smiled bravely, but still, the sad tone was there.

At the end of the ceremony, as Tom and Jody started back down the aisle together as man and wife, the pastor saw a man walk in the back door. He just stood there in the back, without removing his coat or sitting down. And the pastor thought, *I bet that's Jody's father.*

Indeed, it was, and when the newlyweds reached the back of the church, the man put his arms out and Jody moved into them, and they both wept.

Praise the Lord! ...

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 ...

(vv. 1, 3-5)

Rosie, along with her daughter and granddaughter, were active members of a church. Rosie sang in the choir, helped with church projects, served on committees as needed, and so forth. Once, when the pastor accidentally tore his pastoral robe, she took it home and repaired it for him.

But Rosie endured some hard knocks in life, and one of the biggest was when she discovered that her husband had another family in a nearby town. Rosie had since divorced that man, but one of her grown sons somehow took his father's side in that split and made no effort to stay in touch with her. Her other grown son, Mike, had stayed in contact with her, but he'd had his share of problems. He had two sons of his own, but no longer lived with their mother and had a rocky relationship with his current wife.

And then suddenly, Mike was on the front page of the local paper. An argument with his wife had gotten out of hand, he shot her, and she died. He called the police, told them what he had done and where he was. Before the police arrived, he used the gun to kill himself.

The local newspaper had obtained the 911 call Mike made and posted the audio on their website. They also reported the contents of the call in the paper, and it was headlined: “Killer’s 911 call offers chilling insight into wife’s slaying.” Can you imagine what it must have been like for Rosie to learn about this terrible thing her son had done, and then, the next morning, to see that headline in the paper?

Rosie asked her pastor to conduct the funeral for Mike. Mike’s wife’s family was having her funeral separately. As the pastor thought about what he might say at the funeral — and there were some good things to say about Mike — he decided that he should listen to the phone call. The pastor didn’t think news services contributed to the common good when they played private 911 calls for the public to hear, but since they had published it, he listened to it, knowing that he would be speaking to Mike’s family. Once he heard the call, he realized the headline was wrong. There was no “*chilling* insight” into the tragedy. Some editor, he suspected, was trying to sensationalize an event that was not sensational; it was just *sad*. In fact, there was *nothing* “chilling” in Mike’s final phone call. What the pastor heard was deep weariness, the sound of a man for whom the struggle to wring meaning and joy from life had finally become too much. And that made his very last act — the ending of his own life — understandable, even if the pastor could not condone it.

At the funeral, where those gathered grieved both for Mike and for his wife, the pastor explained that he’d listened to Mike’s 911 call and said there was nothing chilling about it.

The pastor talked about the life-weariness he heard in Mike’s comments and voice and went on to share some words of Scripture and some things about Mike. After the funeral, they went to the cemetery where Mike was laid to rest.

Some churches have a wonderful practice called the funeral meal. Here at Divinity, the funeral meal is an important ingredient of the “church diet”. After the committal, the deceased’s survivors and guests come back to the church for a meal prepared by the church folks. And there, many church members came to Rosie and hugged her. The same thing happened the following Sunday when Rosie came to church. People surrounded her with compassion, and it occurred to the pastor that God’s goodness was there in loving actions of God’s people — in their response to the event.

After the morning service, Rosie sought out the pastor privately and said, “What you said at Mike’s funeral about his call not being chilling but simply sad — that *helped* me. Thank you.”

On the way home in the car, it occurred to the pastor that if his words had helped Rosie, then he, too, had been a channel for God’s mercy and goodness to someone who was facing one of the hardest things there is in life.

“... that *helped* me, Rosie said.

Praise the Lord! ...

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. ...

Praise the Lord! (Vv. 1, 7-14)

May the peace of God . . .

#876 – Let the Whole Creation Cry