

Praise the Lord!

Psalm 148*Praise for God's Universal Glory*

1 Praise the LORD!
 Praise the LORD from the heavens;
 praise him in the heights!
 2 Praise him, all his angels;
 praise him, all his host!
 3 Praise him, sun and moon;
 praise him, all you shining stars!
 4 Praise him, you highest heavens,
 and you waters above the heavens!
 5 Let them praise the name of the LORD,
 for he commanded and they were created.
 6 He established them forever and ever;
 he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.
 7 Praise the LORD from the earth,
 you sea monsters and all deeps,
 8 fire and hail, snow and frost,
 stormy wind fulfilling his command!
 9 Mountains and all hills,
 fruit trees and all cedars!
 10 Wild animals and all cattle,
 creeping things and flying birds!
 11 Kings of the earth and all peoples,
 princes and all rulers of the earth!
 12 Young men and women alike,
 old and young together!
 13 Let them praise the name of the LORD,
 for his name alone is exalted;
 his glory is above earth and heaven.
 14 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!¹

We have come to the end of 2010. But we also have an opportunity each day to praise God for all that God had done for us. I was with a young man a few weeks ago who was very distracted and he told me this was the worst year of his life. You, like he, may have had a worst year of your life, but even in the midst of pain and suffering that are things for which we can praise God. The psalmist begins his song with “Praise the

¹ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. Ps 148:1-14

Lord!” and he end “Praise the Lord!” In between the beginning and end the author calls upon the whole of God’s Creation to Praise the Lord. God is not only the Creator of all things, God is also the Redeemer of all things, and not just of Humankind. How else could we look forward to a “new heaven and a new earth”? That is why all things must praise God, again, not just humankind.

Many have used the psalm to write songs of praise to God including St. Francis of Assisi. This song has many familiar lines, like those found in the Book of Common Prayer. The hymn “All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and with us sing, Hallelujah, Hallelujah!” is only one of many modern hymns that take up the strain of Psalm 148.

It is interesting that this song does not contain a “search for God.” Rather it is the song of a person having a dialogue with God, a person who is completely sure of God’s love and care for God’s universe. The psalmist can sing as they do, because they know that they have been redeemed by God. This psalm did not live in a time of peace and easy. They may have been from the post-exilic generation and recognized that the physical redemption they had experienced in being released from bondage in Babylon was just one side of the coin of their blessings. They understood that this was a sign of God’s total redemption of God’s loved ones from the power of all evil. It even included the cosmos, the world. As John 3:16 later puts it in Christian terms, “God so loved the cosmos...” (not just humankind). So now in this psalm the cosmos makes reply in glorious praise.

The poet begins with the world of the spirit, with the entire angelic host. There is a world of angels that serve God continuously. They must be the first to say “Hallelujah”. They are ablest of all who praise God. They were the ones sent to sing praises on the night of Jesus’ birth. Then comes the sky above, with its sun by day and its moon and stars by night. They too are to join in the Hebrew word Hallelujah, “Praise the Lord”. They are able to do so in response to the goodness of God.

During the Second World War the British Broadcasting Corporation sponsored a series of radio talks which they entitled “People Matter”. That was in response to the war machine as it devoured men and women in uniform and in the armaments factories. When the series ended Archbishop Temple, asked if he might give one last talk on the theme “Things Matter”.

Created things, both above and below, are to praise the Lord! It was God who commanded and they were created, the forces of Nature, whose bounds are fixed, must also praise God..

Fire, hail, snow and frost, and stormy wind praise God. They do not fulfill their own desires, but God’s command! Praise of God comes through majestic mountains, and small hills, through fruit trees and cedars, which provide food and building materials. Praise is through the whole animal creation as listed in Genesis chapter one, including sea-monsters and all deeps. The psalmist of 103 tells us that these also are God’s ministers. Even the serpent, which God had himself created to live in the Garden with man (Gen. 3:1), is to praise the Lord. The sea monsters, the Leviathan, the whales, the sharks, all manner of fish are commanded to sing “Hallelujah”. They too are part of the never-ending witness.

The Word, then, that sounds behind, in and through the whole created world is Praise, and it is Good News. It was heard in the song of the angels at Bethlehem (Luke 2:10–14). But it has been there since the beginning, when “all the stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7).

The Good News reaches the ears of kings and commoners alike (verse 11–12), both young and old. J. B. Priestley, the novelist, writes, “Something I never knew in earlier years, the blessed feeling, coming through occasionally like some snatch of heavenly song, the blessed feeling of conscious love. What a prize for fumbling and bewildered old age!”

Nature with its massive forces locked up in atoms and in light may think that it rules and commands the life of the universe. Humankind, with our power of thought and invention, may believe we command the universe. But no—God’s name alone is exalted, God’s glory is above earth and heaven, above Nature, above humankind, and even above the world of the angels and spirit.

But the psalm ends in a paradox. Through the grace of God’s unsearchable understanding (see 147:5), not only does God accept praise, for God’s name is exalted (148:13), God actually exalts Israel, God’s people, and gives them praise in return! God’s saints means, of course, God’s redeemed people, who are near to God within the bonds of the Covenant. In Exodus 19:5 God had claimed Israel as God’s own possession, a kingdom of priests. They were a people called, chosen, reared, educated, and ordained to perform their priestly function to all the other nations of the earth. This function seemed to have been interrupted, even destroyed, by the events of the Exile. But now Israel was back home again in Jerusalem. The full meaning of “redemption”, of “salvation”, of “resurrection”, of “re-creation” could not, however, stop there. Israel had to be re-equipped for her task of living out and sharing God’s rescuing and saving love. That is, of course, first of all, God’s task, but it is also Israel’s task. No wonder the psalmist invites the congregation in return to respond to that great privilege by exclaiming just the one word: “Hallelujah!”²

I invite you now, on the last Sunday of 2010 to give praise for what God has done for you and your family. The psalmist said that all of God’s creation is to praise the Lord. Now you have that same opportunity.

Thanks be unto God for love for us and the proclaiming our love of God by sharing that love with others. Praise the Lord, Hallelujah!

²Knight, George Angus Fulton: *Psalms : Volume 2*. Louisville : Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, c1982 (The Daily Study Bible Series), S. 356