

***Shiloh United Methodist Church***

Praising With Creation

Psalm 148

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September 1, 2019

In the Monty Python movie *The Meaning of Life*, there is a scene in an English Boarding School Chapel. The chaplain stands up and tells the boys,

“Let us praise God.”

The boys all stand and the chaplain continues:

“Oh Lord, oooooooooo you are so big.

So absooooo-lutely huge.

Gosh, we’re all really impressed down here, I can tell you.

Forgive us, O Lord, for this dreadful toadying and bareface flattery.

But you’re so strong and well, just soooooooooo-super

Fannnnnnn-tastic.

Amen.”

If you are even a little familiar with Monty Python you know that they are among the best at satirizing the peculiarities of the praising God business.

Take for example this scene from Monty Python and the Holy Grail. God appears in a cloud to King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table.

Did you hear the line about the Psalms in there that said, “ It’s like those miserable Psalms – they’re so depressing. Now...knock it off.”

Of course, Psalm 148, which we read just a mintues ago, in fact each of the last 4 psalms at the end of the collection of Psalms – can hardly be called depressing. Certainly there are more subdued, even downright sad psalms, but the book of psalms itself, the way the compilers of the scriptures put it together, ends with an exclamation mark! Literally. Like every line in this psalm ends with an exclamation mark.

It looks like my emails look before I go through and remove all the exclamation points and put periods. So people don't think I am too over excited about coffee with the new person to the church next Thursday. I mean I don't want the person who barely knows me to think I am shouting all the time.

And if you think I get excited in my emails, you should read the Bishop's emails. Bishop Karen loves to be excited in emails. So, if our spiritual leaders are excited, maybe we should consider being excited too.

This psalm is not even a little bit self-conscious in its enthusiasm for praising God. If Monty Python can get a laugh preposterously praising God for being “abso-lutely huge,” our psalm writer takes the preposterousness even further – goes COSMIC with it actually – envisioning the sun and moon praising God – commanding sea monsters and fruit trees and cattle to praise the God of all creation.

If you listen closely, the list of things that give praise to God in the psalm follows the first creation story in Genesis 1. The story where God creates the heavens and the earth from the formless void, each part of creation is given this opportunity to praise God for the ways God works in and through their life.

I think this is important when we talk about praising God because often I worry that we get the impression from well-meaning psalms like this, from well-meaning jokes like Monty Python, that God is some kind of needy narcissist, always demanding more and more praise. Gosh, we're all really impressed down here, I can tell you.

But praise –  
when it's genuine –  
is about the realization that something is worthy of praise.

The story of creation, in Genesis, as I've said before is not the story of how the universe was made. Instead, it's a reflection, a celebration, of the ways that God makes the world holy. The way God finds chaos and brings about something good, something life-giving, something redeeming and breathes into the world the life-sustaining breath of goodness, love, creativity, and hope. I don't know if anyone remembers last year when I said what Chaos was, but in Hebrew it sounds like this "Tohu-wa-bohu." God takes this crazy word of chaos and morphs it into song and praise of the good things happening.

And so, the psalmist says, "Look around you and accept this invitation to praise God with all that is in you, with all that God created you to be." Look around you and notice how everything you see is giving thanks for the amazing presence of God bringing life into our world.

In a few minutes we are going to sing a song together. *All God's Creatures Have A Place In the Choir*. As you listen to it, remember, that our psalmist would endorse the song itself. Because it says what they say, that each and everything in the world, the universe praised God by being what it was made to be.

The sun praises God by shining. The wind praises God by blowing and rustling the leaves of the trees. The trees praise God by growing and blossoming and shaking their leaves in the wind.

When my dog take her whole body and snuggles up against me, tail wagging, she is praising God saying, "Thank you God for making me, thank you for inventing this amazing thing called loving touch."

When she chases her toy and smile as she returns it to me she is saying, "Thank you for these legs and this strange shaped toy to chase and this silly human who throws it so I can run!"

And you –  
what about you?  
How do you praise God?  
How did God make you to be?  
Maybe it's your generosity  
that is your way  
of praising God.

Maybe it's your dance moves  
or your singing.

Maybe your laughter  
is your way of praising God.

Or your desire to learn more –  
to study, to discover.

Maybe you praise God  
by using your body  
to run or swim  
or do yoga.

Maybe you praise God best  
when you are very still.

The beauty of it is, the psalmist tells us, that God created all of all of us.  
In our differences we form this great amazing chorus of praise, with  
notes and harmonies that come from so many wonderful places and in  
so many amazing ways. Each part of creation contributes its own part.

For each part,  
because of each part,  
we are blessed –  
and so we sing...

Shalom and Amen to all of us.

\*Serious kudos to Rev. Sarah Beck at Grace UMC Billings for the great  
sermon this is based/nearly plagiarized from. What a privilege to work  
with this great colleague who is willing to share great work.

