

**Always Praising
Psalm 150
Everton Hills
20 August 2017**

An old farmer went to the city one weekend and attended the big city church. He came home and his wife asked him how it was.

“Well,” said the farmer. “It was good. They did something different, however. They sang praise choruses instead of hymns.”

“Praise choruses?” asked the wife. “What are those?”

“Oh, they’re okay. They’re sort of like hymns, only different,” said the farmer.

“Well, what’s the difference?” asked the wife.

The farmer said, “Well it’s like this ... If I were to say to you, ‘Martha, the cows are in the corn,’ well that would be a hymn. If, on the other hand, I were to say to you, ‘Martha, Martha, Martha, Oh, Martha, MARTHA, MARTHA, the cows, the big cows, the brown cows, the black cows, the white cows, the black and white cows, the COWS, COWS, COWS are in the corn, are in the corn, are in the corn, in the CORN, CORN, CORN, COOOOORRRRRNNNNN,’ then, if I were to repeat the whole thing two or three times, well that would be a praise chorus.”

As luck would have it, the exact same Sunday a young, new Christian from the city church attended the small town church. He came home and his wife asked him how it was.

“Well,” said the young man, “It was good. They did something different, however. They sang hymns instead of regular songs.”

“Hymns?” asked the wife. “What are those?”

“They’re okay. They’re sort of like regular songs, only different,” said the young man.

“Well, what’s the difference?” asked the wife.

The young man said, “Well it’s like this ... If I were to say to you, ‘Martha, the cows are in the corn,’ well that would be a regular song. If on the other hand, I were to say to you,

Oh Martha, dear Martha, hear thou my cry
Inclined thine ear to the words of my mouth.
Turn thou thy whole wondrous ear by and by
To the righteous, glorious truth.

For the way of the animals who can explain
There in their heads is no shadow of sense,
Hearkenest they in God’s sun or his rain
Unless from the mild, tempting corn they are fenced.

Yea those cows in glad bovine, rebellious delight,
Have broke free their shackles, their warm pens eschewed.
Then goaded by minions of darkness and night
They all my mild Chilliwack sweet corn chewed.

So look to that bright shining day by and by,
Where all foul corruptions of earth are reborn
Where no vicious animal makes my soul cry

And I no longer see those foul cows in the corn,

then, if I were to do only verses one, three and four, and change keys on the last verse, well that would be a hymn.”

The final Psalm in the Psalter, Psalm 150, says just one thing... **Praise God.**

It's a simple statement, but what does it really mean? In fact, **what** is 'praise'? And **why** should we 'praise'? And **how** should we 'praise'? And **what does 'praise' actually do?**

Well, we know that praise works better than criticism. As parents, we try to catch our children doing the right thing, because when we do, children tend to focus more on doing the right thing.

If you are married, and you want to get the best out of your partner, we know love has a greater positive response, than snarly criticism.

The same is true in business.

But this isn't the sort of praise that the Psalmist is talking about. The Psalmist is not saying that we can manipulate God simply because we say nice things to him or about him. In fact, Jesus said it clearly that God **“gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.” (Matthew 5:45)**

The Hebrew word for praise is “Hallelujah”. It means to shine, or to flash forth, or to be boastful, or to celebrate. So when the Psalmist talks about praising God, the Psalmist is actually calling us to acknowledging who God is, and what God does.

That is important. How often we forget from where the good times come? We live in such a prosperous society, that it is so easy to take stuff for granted. So remembering and retelling who God is, and what God does, is an important part of praise – it builds collective memory.

Share where you have seen God act this week.

So in this context Psalm 150 is about (**Praise God Everywhere**) praising, worshipping, and acknowledging God's presence and involvement in all things!

“Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heaven!” (Psalm 150:1, NLT)

Praise God in his sanctuary. The Psalmist is not talking about a building! Sometimes we spend so much time and money maintaining and beautifying a building that we forget that God's sanctuary is outside too. In fact, I've always thought it would be cool to remove the shutters that we have behind the glass, so that as we worship we can also see God's creative nature. (But maybe that is a discussion that needs to be had another time.)

The thing is, the ancients viewed all of life as worship... and that is something that our compartmentalized lives tend to forget. We talk about having our jobs, our families, our sport, our church. But that is not seeing God in all of life.

The reformer Martin Luther, came up with the concept of life being vocation – and in that he wasn't talking about what it was that we did (our job), he was talking about seeing all of life in relationship to God. And when we do that, it changes our perspective of worship and praise... because then the way we interact with our classmates or co-workers is an act of worship; the way we drive down the highway and respond to other drivers are acts of worship; the way we care for our possessions and share our blessings with others are also acts of worship and praise.

Secondly, the Psalmist says we should **Praise God with Everything**

Most of us understand the role of music in worship... in fact music is a powerful tool – it can describe feelings that words can't describe, and it can draw you into places you might never imagine. And that was one of the gifts of the Reformation – it is said that through the Reformation singing became a more important part of the worship experience. And that the Roman Catholics feared the singing of the Lutherans more than they feared the sermons of Martin Luther.

But the Psalmist says that we should do more than just play music. The psalmist also encourages us to dance! Some of you tried that last week, and felt somewhat conspicuous.

“Praise him with a blast of the ram’s horn; praise him with the lyre and harp! Praise him with the tambourine and dancing; praise him with strings and flutes! Praise him with a clash of cymbals; praise him with loud clanging cymbals.” (Psalm 150:3–5, NLT)

So the Psalmist says, if you can't dance, try the tambourine, or flutes, or cymbals. In fact try praising God with loud clanging cymbals.

In other words, we are able to praise God, acknowledge him, with more than just our voices. We can use our bodies to praise God.

We can clap our hands, tap our feet, and sway to the music.

We can join in with the children of the congregation who dance in the aisle in praise to God.

But the implication is one step further. We can worship God with non-musical instruments. Because when we use whatever we have, and whoever we are for a holy purpose—to touch lives with God's love – then we are praising God!

And then we get to that final exclamation!

(Everything Praise the Lord)

“Let everything that breathes sing praises to the LORD! Praise the LORD!” (Psalm 150:6, NLT)

After expanding the parameters of praise, the psalmist then exhorts everything that breathes to praise the Lord! What a wonderful image of creation.

Yet, we often travel through life so fast, that we don't notice God. We are so busy going from one place to the next, eyes fixed on mobile phones, listen to the radio or the news, that we can't hear God's words or God's praise. Both situations lead to the thoughts that God isn't present in the world, and we may even begin to question the existence of God.

But the psalmist sees that the world is filled with the praises of God—a virtual symphony of praise. Ancient and distant galaxies. A gentle breeze blowing through the trees. The mournful sound of a curlew. The song of a cicada. The Psalmist says that even these are all an acknowledgement of God.

Creation is filled with God and with God's praises. We, who are God's people, are invited to join in with the rest of creation to praise the creator, because God is worthy of our praise and worship.

Life is not only an opportunity to live in a personal relationship with God. It is also a time when we can become instruments of God's praise and worship. Life is transformed when we understand ourselves to be called to the high plain of worship and praise instead of simply existence.

Prayer of Confession

Loving Lord. The Psalmist says Let everything that has breath praise you.

Forgive us because we don't.

We are too busy to slow down and notice you.

We are too selfish, and too self-righteous, to love with your love.

We judge those who worship you differently to the way we worship you.

Father forgive us. Forgive us for our sins and our shortcomings.

Have your peace and loving presence occupy our hearts, so that we can indeed praise you through everything.

Absolution

The Psalmist says, "Let everything that breathes sing praises to the Lord!" Even our honest confession is action of praise.

The Word says, "if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness". So in the name of Jesus know that your sins are forgiven.

Amen.