

Praise the Lord!
Psalm 150
John 4:24-26

Westminster Presbyterian Church
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Psalm 150

Praise the Lord!
Praise God in his sanctuary;
 praise him in his mighty firmament!
Praise him for his mighty deeds;
 praise him according to his surpassing greatness!

Praise him with trumpet sound;
 praise him with lute and harp!
Praise him with tambourine and dance;
 praise him with strings and pipe!
Praise him with clanging cymbals;
 praise him with loud clashing cymbals!
Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord!

John 4:24-26

[Jesus said,] ‘God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’ The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am he, the one who is speaking to you.’

This whole month of July, we’ve been talking about the Psalms, and about the types of prayer that they teach us. We’ve talked about psalms of praise: “Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the Earth.”, We’ve talked about psalms of lament: “How long, O Lord, How long?”. We’ve talked about psalms of trust in God: “The Lord is my Shepherd.” We’ve talked about prayers of thanksgiving: “O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever.”

This week, we heard the last psalm in the psalter, the hymnbook of the Ancient Hebrews. This hymn of praise for God is different from Psalm 100, the first one we looked at. Psalm 100 specifies why we should praise God. It spells out, “Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.”¹ There are other psalms that

¹ Psalm 100:3

lay out all the wonderful things that God has done for the Hebrew people: sending plagues to the Egyptians to make them let the Hebrew go.² Parting the Red Sea.³ Leading them through the wilderness with fire and cloud.⁴ Giving them the Promised Land not by their own strength, but by “God’s right hand.”⁵

This Psalm doesn’t lay out details about how awesome God is. This Psalm just says, “Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his surpassing greatness!” After you have heard the other psalms talking about how great God is, you don’t need to elaborate about why worship God.

The psalm calls for all the earth to praise God: “Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!” This is not just the Hebrew people. This is not just the Hebrew people and the people whom they know. This is not even just people!

Everything that breathes.

Everything that breathes is called to worship God.

God has done amazing things for the world. Jesus came into the world not just for the Hebrew people. Not just for the Hebrew people and the people whom they knew. Not even just for people! The most famous verse in the Bible says, “For God so loved the world,” – no, it doesn’t. The word being translated “World” is actually “*Cosmos*.” “For God so loved the *cosmos*, that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”⁶

² Psalm 78:43-51

³ Psalm 78:13, 106:9, 136:13

⁴ Psalm 78:14, 105:39

⁵ Psalm 44:3

⁶ John 3:16.

So everything in the *cosmos* is called to worship God.

To worship someone or something is to consciously, or unconsciously, pay a lot of attention to that person or thing, and to let that person or thing have the ultimate meaning in your life. Everyone here does that, every day. Not just for one hour on Sunday morning, but every hour of every day. And so does everybody else out there.

As the author and intellectual Robert Foster Wallace said, "...in the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship... If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough. ...Worship your body and beauty ... and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you.... Worship power, you will end up feeling weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to numb you to your own fear. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out."⁷

The truly insidious thing about worshipping these things is not that this worship is evil or sinful, though it is, but that it is unconscious. These things creep into our consciousness from the world around us out there. "They're the kind of worship you just gradually slip into, day after day, getting more and more selective about what you see and how you measure value without ever being fully aware that that's what you're doing."⁸

The so-called "real world out there," the world of money and power, runs on these forms of worship. The forces of fear and anger and frustration and craving and self-worship are all

⁷ "This is Water," Commencement Speech, Kenyon College, 2005.

⁸ Wallace, "This is Water," *op.cit.*

around us, and our culture has harnessed these forces in ways that have yielded extraordinary wealth and comfort and personal freedom for many people.

Thousands of people make their livings from people's insecurities about their bodies and media-defined beauty. If millions of people did not worship their bodies and people seeing them as beautiful, beauty and fashion really wouldn't be such big industries. Ladies, incidentally, I suspect that your clothes would have pockets.

If you doubt that people out there worship power, all I can say is turn on your TV. Or read your newspaper. People who honestly intend to be good Christians, or good Jews, or good Muslims, find themselves saying and advocating and doing things that are completely at odds with the tenets of their faith.

Morality is not an issue of Republican versus Democrat. Morality is a matter of right versus wrong. But, for people who have been engaged in a two-party conflict for too long, it becomes very easy to see everything as us versus them.

When we do that, we stop seeing people on the opposite side as children of God. They become hashtags, or simple nameless, faceless, *THEM*. When that happens, and it happens to people who truly intend the best for all involved, they are worshipping worldly power and not God. That deceptive worship of power has ever-so-gradually crept in.

People worship their own intellect, and seeing themselves as smart. I'm convinced that this is why there are still quiz shows on television, they weren't just a fad of the 1950's.⁹ Full

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1950s_quiz_show_scandals

disclosure, even though I know I don't have all the answers, this is one of my own weaknesses. I take the *Jeopardy!* online test each year, and I am in the large pool of people from whom they call their contestants.

So what do we do about it? These things are out there, sneaking their way into our consciousness every day. Many, many people out there are worshipping these things, which ultimately will eat them alive.

How do we keep from getting swept up in them?

We need to be reminded.

We need to be reminded who we are, and whose we are.

We need to be reminded to praise the Lord.

We need to be reminded that God loves us.

We need to be reminded of all that God has done for us, and all that God continues to do for us.

We need to be reminded that God loves *Them*.

We need to be reminded that God has done those things for them, too. Whoever you thought of when I said *Them*.

This is why we gather here together every Sunday, even when the weather is beautiful and there's a piece of some of us that would rather be on the lake or at the Fair. That's why we gather here, even when there's snow on the ground and there's a piece of some of us that would rather be home in the warmth.

I remind you that you are a Child of God, who should be worshipping God. I point out to you where God is at work in the world. You remind me that I am a Child of God, who should be worshipping God. You point out to me where God is at work in the world. We remind each other. And, together, we worship the amazing Almighty God.

Over the course of a week, lots of ...crud creeps into our consciousness and into our hearts. That won't ever stop until the end, when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.¹⁰ Over the course of a week we accumulate stuff that shouldn't be there, like a hoarder on television piling up newspapers. We need to clear all that out, and be reminded that God is what matters.

That reminder enables us to worship God in spirit and in truth.

That reminder enables us to go out into the world as God's children, ready to worship God by doing God's will in the world. Ready to worship God not just on Sunday morning, but the rest of the week. Not just here on Schoolhouse Lane, but out there in the world. We do that by how we live our lives, and by how we maintain our relationships with God and with our neighbors. All our neighbors. Even *those* neighbors.¹¹

For that is how we can truly be God's children in the world.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.

¹⁰ Romans 14:11.

¹¹ Whoever you thought of when I said "*those* neighbors."