

“How Do We Praise God?”

Psalm 150:1-6

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Praise is defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as ‘to glorify or to express thanks to or show love and respect for God.’ What does it mean to praise God? Christians often speak of ‘praising God’ and the Bible commands all living creatures to praise the Lord. The book of Psalms is a collection of songs filled with praises to God.

From Psalm 9 verse 2: “I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High”. From Psalm 18 verse 3: “I call to the Lord who is worthy of praise.” From Psalm 21 verse 13: praises God both for who He is and for His great power: “Be exalted in your strength, LORD; we will sing and praise your might.”

From Psalms 150 Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals. Let everything that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.’

Did you hear it in Psalm 150? The term praise is used thirteen times in six verses and defines where, why, and how praise should be done. Verse one provides the “where” of praise—everywhere! “Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens.”

The next verse teaches “why” to praise the Lord: “Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.” Verses 3–6 show “how” to praise the Lord—with a variety of instruments, dance, and everything that has breath. Every means we have to make sound is to be used to praise the Lord!

In the New Testament, there are many examples of praise given to Jesus. Matthew 21 verse 16 refers to those who praised Jesus as He rode a donkey into Jerusalem. Matthew 8 verse 2 notes a centurion who bowed down before Jesus. In Luke 24 verse 32 the disciples of Jesus were said to worship Him after His resurrection. Jesus accepted praise as God.

Praise is a vital part of a life surrendered to God, and it gives credit where credit is due. Here these words from Psalm 107:8: “O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!”

As I read these words from scripture, I wondered what does the word “praise” really mean to us in this time and place. Well, for me praise means worshiping God on a Sunday morning by singing hymns, praying, and giving of my tithes and offerings. It also means thanking God each day for all that has been given me; praising God’s gifts of beauty through nature; for people with foresight who make a difference in our world such as Diane Albright’s work with Houses for Haiti and Kara Vanderkamp’s work with Remember Niger; and especially for allowing me, empowering me, to use my time and talents to glorify and praise God’s name through missions.

So how do I praise God? In my daily living, do I glorify or express my thanks and show my love and respect for God? Looking back over the years, I can see that I praised God by

trying to glorify God through the use of my time and talents. A verse that reflects my thoughts on praising God is from I Peter 4. It reads, "If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To God be the glory and the power forever and ever". I love the words 'do so with the strength God provides.'

Basically, my time and talents have allowed me to interact with children through a number of organizations. An early one was the St. Paul Jaycees whose community dedication allowed me to interact and uplift many children in St. Paul. One time I had to plan and take 10 mentally challenged children, ages 6 to 16, on a day long fishing trip and picnic. It was a tiring and stressful day, but I can tell you it was also one of the most rewarding days of my life. The laughter and shouting of the children and their enthusiasm for all we did made me feel that God was praised through their joyful noise.

Another project involved planning and implementing a Holiday Party for disadvantaged children in St. Paul. This party involved picking the children up from their homes, taking them Christmas shopping at Target or K-Mart for gifts for their families, and then going to lunch and an afternoon of wrapping all of those gifts they had bought. The children were so thankful and excited about the gifts and learned the true meaning of the season that giving is better than receiving. For me this was a time to reflect on the true spirit of the season and how God's graciousness and love for the least of these had brought praise and glory to God's name.

Now I am still able to glorify God through the work I do for Remember Niger and the Presbyterian Women's organization as well as a few more. As I give more of myself to these endeavors which God has set before me, the more I thank God for empowering me to do good works through the strength that God provides. I know we all praise God in different and unique ways. If you think about it, God can be praised by volunteering at your children's school, by filling bags of food at Feed My Starving Children, or by bagging groceries at the North St. Paul Food Shelf.

At North we as a congregation praise God in many ways.

- By attending Sunday worship.
- By serving as an usher, a greeter, a member of the choir or praise band, a hospitality member, a Sunday school teacher, a bible school worker, a Deacon, an Elder, a lay reader, a member at large of a commission.
- By supporting our youth through donations to work camp, planning fundraising events to subsidize work camp expenses, being a mentor, being a Wednesday night youth volunteer.
- By supporting missions through our offerings and tithes for Presbyterian Disaster Assistance and Hunger Programs, and the 4 special PCUSA Mission Offerings.
- By giving to the clothing drives, the North St. Paul Food Shelf, Store to Door, the Mitten Tree, the Shoe Box collection, School Tools collection and Undie Sunday.
- By supporting Remember Niger, Houses for Haiti, the Gathering.
- By knitting or crocheting prayer shawls, baptismal shawls, baby hats.
- Through participation on the Prayer Chain.

Do you realize that even small acts of kindness mean just as much as the large ones when praising God? If you send a card to or visit someone who is homebound or sick couldn't it make their day brighter? What if you smile at someone as you're walking down the street or in

the aisle at the grocery store and say hello? Might that not help brighten their day and lighten their heart? Think about all you do each and every day for your family. Won't you be praising God because of your love for these special people? Little acts of kindness reap great rewards and praise the name of our God.

For me how do we praise God through worship became another question that needed answering? The first thought that came to my mind was that on most Sunday's we sing the Doxology after the offering is received. Did you listen to the words? Do you listen to the words as you sing them or are they just sung from rote memory? What meaning do the words 'Praise God through whom all blessings flow' have for you? Can you relate to these words and identify how you praise God through the missions you support, through how you worship, how you serve others, and how you live your daily life? God receives praise and glory through Sunday worship whether at the Traditional service or the Praise service.

Let me share a story about an experience I had when I attended a worship service with my niece at her church in Virginia. She is a very passionate Christian and this service reflected her style of worship and praise. The service was held in a movie theatre. Yes, a movie theatre! I wasn't impressed by the location. Everything was very loud, nothing like the traditional services I am used to. The worshippers were praising God through the singing of songs with the background of drums, guitars, cymbals and keyboard. I was totally out of my element, uncomfortable and wanting to be somewhere else. I asked myself how could my niece, who was raised in a traditional Lutheran congregation, possibly think this was the way to praise God. Well, looking back on this I can say I was not thinking like a Christian. I was not accepting how these people were worshipping and praising God because it did not fit with my norm. I have a feeling God wasn't too pleased with me that day.

As I studied scripture for this message it helped me to understand that my conception of worship and praising God is part and parcel with the conception of worship and praising God as experienced at my niece's church. Both ways of worshipping have been with us since time began. The words we heard in Psalm 150 certainly define our Praise Service. And likewise, the words in Psalm 95 verses 6 and 7 reflect our Traditional Service where it says: "Come, let us bow down in worship. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker, for he is our God." Here at North Church we are blessed to have both types of service and both are equally worthy for worshipping and praising God.

I've shared this information about 'praise' with you as today is the Presbyterian Women's Praise Service, our way of praising God before our congregations and saying 'thank you' to God for all of the blessings bestowed upon us. Through God's blessings, women of the church have been able to show God's love in many ways, from advocating for women's rights to rallying against racism and racially motivated violence; to spreading the word about abuse, violence against women, human trafficking, and addressing the issues of hunger and clean water in our world. Over the years, we have helped to build some of the best hospitals, schools, orphanages, domestic violence shelters and countless other church-related projects both in the United States and throughout the world. We have left our mark in just about every country in the world where the Presbyterian Church USA has participated in God's mission,

The Purpose we adhere to today is the same as the purpose our predecessors adhered to; we nurture our faith, we support mission of the church worldwide, we work for justice and

peace, we try to build an inclusive, caring community of women that strengthens our Church, and we witness to the promise of God's kingdom.

As we move forward with P.W., we understand that the legacy of devotion to the church and dedication to God are a strong foundation for continuing mission and taking Christ into every area of life. We know that Presbyterian Women exist today because women are and have been adaptable, determined, proactive, charitable, generous, and dedicated to God. We realize that the women of today are not the women of yesterday and our organization must change in order to keep the legacy of P.W. alive. We can only do this if all women, not just circle members, of the Presbyterian Church USA work toward moving the organization forward.

So with these thoughts in mind, I ask all women here to ponder these questions:

- How can we, together in Christ, continue the legacy of P.W.?
- How can we find the common ground between generations?
- How can we learn to communicate better with each other?
- How do we determine what currently is important as we move forward and what needs to be changed'?

It would be devastating if the Presbyterian Women's organization did not continue because of lack of trying to bring about the changes needed. As women in Christ we must all continue to make a difference by using our time and talents for those causes we hold closest to our hearts. Together, with God's help, we can embrace one another for who we are and continue the great work of P.W. And together in Christ all Christians, men and women alike, can praise God through every act of love toward another. Amen.