

Call to Worship (Psalm 135)

Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good: sing to God's name for God is gracious. For we know that the Lord is great; our Lord is above all gods.

It is God who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth; God makes lightning for the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses.

Prayer of Invocation

Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and we shall be created and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations, through Christ the Lord, Amen.

The Word Psalm 47

Clap your hands, all you people! Shout joyfully to God with loud songs of joy!
For the LORD Most High is awesome, A great king over all the earth, who subdues the nations under us, and all people beneath our feet. God chooses our inheritance for us: the pride of Jacob, whom God loves.

God has gone up with a joyous shout— the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.
Sing praises to God! Sing praises! Sing praises to our ruler! Sing praises because God is ruler of all the earth! Sing praises with a psalm!

God reigns over the nations. God sits on his holy throne.

The leaders of all people are gathered as the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God, who is highly exalted;

Living the Word

Hebrew Poetry, of which the psalms are, was written in several different forms. Many of them include couplets which relate in some way. Psalm 47 gives us a line and then repeats the same thought. For instance:

Clap your hands, all you peoples;
shout to God with loud songs of joy.
For the LORD, the Most High, is awesome,
a great king over all the earth,

Who subdued peoples under us,
and nations under our feet.
God chose our heritage for us,
the pride of Jacob whom God loves.

This is called Synonymous – Parallelism or more easily said a parallel synonym. As we study the Psalms we find that this same form is used often. As we study the hymns of praise we find that they were written primarily for use in worship in the Temple.

In Psalm 47 the emphasis is upon what God, who reigns as sovereign over all the earth has done for this special group of people. This psalm was specifically written and used for New Years worship every year. The Hebrew people knew that God was deserving of praise always and forever, whereas human kings were not always worthy of praise.

Each year for the New Year, their human kings were re-crowned, if they were worthy of praise. The service was laid out like this: Once a year the king made a dramatic climb to his throne in Jerusalem and was re-crowned as king, all over again. By having to be re-crowned he was being reminded that a human king is only "God's silly vassal" as Andrew Melville told King James to his face.

On the other hand and at the same time the king was God's anointed one! Consequently, his action as he ascended the throne dramatized on earth the nature and purpose of God as King of all the earth. As some point in the drama the people yelled "The Lord is King! But of course, the yell reminded Israel that God was the King of all nations and over the forces of nature as well.

In this way the people were reminded of God's mighty acts each year and they were declared in a new event for the people, not just things of the past, but meaningful acts for the future as well. First the people gathered, coming as a pilgrimage from far-away places to be a part of this annual event to renew their faith. The event began with the leader inviting them to clap their hands and sing to God with loud songs of joy.

Have you ever been at a huge rally of people where the leader is trying to get everyone's attention and uses the clap method? In the midst of the noise they shout. "Clap once if you hear my voice." So, those closest clap once. Others now hear something is going on and when the leader says "clap twice if you can hear my voice," more respond until all are listening.

We can wonder if it was what the leaders of ancient time employed as well! Or was the clapping more spontaneous as we sometimes experience here in worship when the anticipation of something is just too good to wait any longer for. Either way – we know they were clapping in worship thousands of years before we did.

Next, the drama would really begin: A royal procession, possibly from the gate of the temple right to the steps of the throne. The king would lead the line of those important enough to be in the parade. He would then climb the steps up to a high enough place as to be above all present and sit on the throne.

As the human king finally took his seat upon the throne, the spokesman declared, in a loud voice, "God has gone up with a shout, with the sound of a 'ram's horn'. The ram's horn was and still is today sounded for the New Year worship in the synagogue. The version of the Psalm we read today called it a trumpet, which sounds more common to us and fits better into our 'kingly' understandings.

And so as their earthly king was re-crowned they gave praise to their Almighty King, God. The final act of the drama is now played out as the people make their witness to the Covenant which God had made with Abraham so long before.

Genesis 12:1-3 "Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.³I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

This whole event reminds us that God always deserves our praise. We as humans sometimes deserve praise and sometimes are just too human. Which is brought to us over and over in our lives, as we celebrate events, knowing that we can honor the important people with praise, with the understanding that anything good that we are, comes from God. It is really all about God and what God can do through willing humans.

This brings us to Father's Day! I will not be here to preach next Sunday, I will be at the Wisconsin United Methodist Annual Conference, so I would say a bit today about Father's Day: A day to re-crown the man who was at least partly responsible for who we are. First, let me say that though some of us got a pretty great paternal parent, not everyone has. We don't get to choose our parents – some are good and some are not so good.

The Rev. J. Richard Peck's father was no saint; "Yes, my father was a curmudgeon who could make life difficult." Peck, a retired clergy member of the New York Annual Conference, remembers being sworn at and put down by his father, "I still remember the welts on my arms when Dad became especially angry at me for overstaying swim time at Washington Park Lake."

" But how we choose to remember our fathers is up to us — not them." Peck goes on to write "The failures of our fathers need to be understood and forgiven and their finer attributes celebrated, and they should be honored by words and deeds." However you celebrate your father remember that they are only human, but inspired and loved by God.

We are all only too human, yet we have many examples in our lives of the people who have taken God's covenant to bless us and have used the inspirations of the Holy Spirit in their lives to make a difference. Remember Henry Van Dyke that I introduced you to earlier in the service? Here is some of what he did with God's inspiration for his life: Henry Van Dyke

- became pastor of the Brick Presbyterian church in New York City
- a professor of English literature at Princeton
- author of numerous books, including 'The Other Wiseman'
- American ambassador to the Netherlands and Luxembourg
- Lieutenant commander in the US Navy Chaplains Corp during WWI
- Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church
- Commander of the Legion of Honor
- President of the National Institute of Arts and Letters
- Chairman of the committee that compiled the Presbyterian 'Book of Common Worship'

For a few moments I invite you to visualize some of the words we sang in his hymn:

'Hearts unfold like flowers before thee'
'Melt the clouds of sin and sadness, drive the dark of doubt away'
'Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day!
'Wellspring of the joy of living, ocean depths of happy rest!'
'Teach us how to love each other; lift us to the joy divine'
'Mortals join the mighty chorus, which the morning stars began'
'Joyful music lifts us sunward, in the triumph song of life.'

What great imagery for us to set our Godly hearts on. Words that can only inspire us when we want to live an exclamation point life. The question for us is, are we willing to accept the inspirations God gives us to become worthy of praise? Is the example we are for others an inspiration for them to praise God?

No matter what kind of father you got, can you give some praise to God for them today? Are the people in our lives deserving of praise? Are they acquiring that praise? (Do people honor God for who they are.) How do they receive that praise?(Are they taking the credit or pointing to God?) We should also ask ourselves the same questions...

One more hymn story. This one about the hymn we will sing next. The year was 1820, Fanny Crosby, at age six weeks old, caught a cold and developed inflammation of the eyes. Mustard poultices were applied to treat the discharges. According to Crosby, this procedure damaged her optic nerves and blinded her. At the age of eight Crosby wrote her first poem, which described her condition.

Crosby later remarked: "It seemed intended by the blessed providence of God that I should be blind all my life, and I thank him for the dispensation. If perfect earthly sight were offered me tomorrow I would not accept it. I might not have sung hymns to the praise of God if I had been distracted by the beautiful and interesting things about me."⁴

With the encouragement of her grandmother, and later Mrs. Hawley, from the age of ten, Crosby had memorized five chapters of the Bible each week, until by the age of fifteen Crosby had memorized the four gospels, the Pentateuch, the Book of Proverbs, the Song of Solomon, and many of the Psalms.

From 1832, a music teacher came to Ridgefield twice a week to give singing lessons to Crosby and some of the other children. Around the same time, Crosby attended her first Methodist church services at the Methodist Episcopal Church where she was delighted by their hymns.[[]

In 1835, just before her 15th birthday, Crosby enrolled at the New York Institution for the Blind (NYIB), a state-financed school. She remained there for eight years as a student, and another two years as a graduate pupil, during which she learned to play the piano, organ, harp, and guitar, and became a good soprano singer.

After graduation from the NYIB in 1843, Crosby joined a group of lobbyists in Washington, D.C. arguing for support of education for the blind. Crosby was the first woman to speak in the United States Senate when she read a poem there.

In 1846 Crosby was an instructor at the NYIB, and was listed as a "graduate pupil". She subsequently joined the school's faculty, teaching grammar, rhetoric, and history; she remained there until three days before her wedding on March 5, 1858.

While teaching at the NYIB Crosby befriended future US president Grover Cleveland then aged 17. Cleveland and Crosby spent many hours together at the end of each day, and Cleveland often transcribed the poems Crosby dictated to him.

Crosby was "the most prolific of all nineteenth-century American sacred song writers". By the end of her career she had written almost 9,000 hymns. The publishers didn't want too many of one writer's works in their song books so she was published under numerous different names.

Crosby described her hymn-writing process: 'It may seem a little old-fashioned, always to begin one's work with prayer, but I never undertake a hymn without first asking the good Lord to be my inspiration. Crosby was inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame in 1975.

In 1954, Billy Graham was planning an evangelistic crusade at London's Haringay Arena. As Cliff Barrows, music director for the Graham team, was compiling hymns for the event, he was given Ms Crosby's hymn "To God be the Glory." It was new to him, but he included it.

Meanwhile the British Press was critical of Graham and it was predicted that he would return to America ashamed and embarrassed. A member of the British Parliament threatened a challenge in the House of Commons, accusing Graham of interfering in British politics and calling it religion. Friends in high places were advising Graham to cancel or postpone the meetings, but he dropped to his knees and prayed.

As it turned out Haringay Arena was packed for three months, and the crusade sparked a sense of revival across Great Britain. "To God Be the Glory" seemed a fitting theme. Fanny Crosby's old hymn was sung almost every night.

The original title was 'Praise for Redemption.' The words remind us that Christ came, lived and died for us and no matter our past, we can be forgiven and live in praise of God. 'O Come to the Father thru Jesus the Son, and give him the glory, great things he has done!' Exclamation point! Sing it as a hymn - prayer of praise with me...