

SECOND READING: Psalm 113

pg 563 OT

Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD; praise the name of the LORD. <sup>2</sup>Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time on and forevermore. <sup>3</sup>From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the LORD is to be praised. <sup>4</sup>The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. <sup>5</sup>Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth? <sup>7</sup>He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap, <sup>8</sup>to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people. <sup>9</sup>He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the LORD!

FIRST READING: 1 Samuel 2: 1-9

pg 245 OT

Then Hannah prayed and said: "My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted in my God.<sup>[a]</sup> My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in my<sup>[b]</sup> victory. <sup>2</sup>"There is no Holy One like the LORD, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. <sup>4</sup>The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. <sup>5</sup>Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. <sup>6</sup>The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts. <sup>8</sup>He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and on them he has set the world. <sup>9</sup>"He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness; for not by might does one prevail.

This is the word of the Lord...**THANKS BE TO GOD**

## “Hallelujah”

“*Hallelujah*”! *Halle-lu* is, in Hebrew, the imperative form of the verb “to praise”. It’s a command, not an exclamation. And it’s in the 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural tense (all of you). And *yah* is the shortened form of YHWH, the name of God. So “*Hallelujah*” means “*All of you, praise the LORD!*” or maybe better, “*All y’all, praise the LORD!*” Our text today, Psalm 113, begins and ends with, “*Hallelujah*”, (it’s bookended with it), and then “*hallelujah*” is repeated throughout the body of the psalm too. Evidently, the psalmist was making certain that readers and singers of his psalm really got the point! That is, we should be giving praise to our Lord. “*From the rising of the sun to the setting of the sun,*” it says, **we need praise the Lord’s name!**

Old Testament scholars like Paul K. Cho tell us that this type call to praise the LORD is repeated more than 50 times in the Psalter, the large book of Psalms, but the vast majority of these are found toward the end. The reason why becomes obvious when we step back and take a look at a bit of the historical context. The Psalter has a story to tell. It’s mostly about kingship. The first 3 inner books or groupings of psalms tell the story of King David and his monarchy. But the psalms of the 4<sup>th</sup> book, beginning with Ps 90, show that a crisis was brought on by the demise of David’s monarchy and the deportation of the people into exile and slavery. The crisis was the creation of doubt in the people’s minds about kingship in general, even God’s kingship.

Consequently, these latter psalms, like Psalm 113, in books IV and V were purposeful in claiming that “*God was, is, and will always be the King, not only over Israel, but over all nations and all creation, forever and ever. Amen*”.<sup>1</sup> Paul Cho says that “*Psalm 113 marks a decisive moment in the journey of all ‘servants of the LORD’ toward our ultimate destiny, which is to praise.*”<sup>2</sup> Yes, we humans, were created to praise our Lord! We were created to praise, from sunrise to sunset, all the day long! Hallelujah.

Now...the question for us today, brothers and sisters, is this: while the command is written for the “servants of the Lord,” (not everyone) to praise, it still seems somewhat impossible for

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<sup>1</sup>Paul K.-K. Cho. “Commentary on Psalm 113” [https://ww.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id+2963](https://ww.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id+2963).(accessed 9-19-19).

<sup>2</sup> Paul K.-K. Cho.

even the most devout among us to be happy, praising God all the time, doesn't it? Sure, it's easy to sing a doxology on a Sunday, here at church, when the sky is blue and the birds are singing, when the morning's sun is streaming in through the tall windows, and the choir has sung a lovely anthem, and the children have made us smile with their adorableness, when we can already smell Don Taylor's pork cooking. But what about when it's not a beautiful day? The psalmist is talking about every day. And he's saying, all day long, from the rising of the sun to its setting. Is that realistic or just poetic?

I remember some of the criticism that was raised when "Praise & Worship" services were new things in the Church. The criticism was directed at the fact that these services were all filled with clapping and upbeat music. (not so anymore but then yes). They were led by "praise" bands often with a smiling young singer at an electric keyboard or playing an acoustic guitar. The criticisms amidst glowing adulations included such comments as, *"What do these services offer the worshipper who is coming to church because they need to have some quiet time away from suffocating, crushing stress of work?"* *"What about the woman who comes because she's been beaten by her boyfriend or the man whose been fired from his job?"* or *"the widow who comes for the first time since her husband has died"*? *They don't want all that upbeat music! They need a lament service!* I do recall some of that criticism, and there was some validity there.

But if you remember the historical context in which this psalmist likely wrote Ps 113 (i.e. from slavery and exile), you'll realize he knew human angst all too well, and you'll realize that the praise that he called for was NOT a momentary hap, hap, happiness, but a deep joy-filled worship of our God. He called for a holy reverence, an honor, a lifting up of our Creator God who is above all, whose "glory is beyond the heavens", and whose presence, unlike a human king, is felt so closely, closer to us than the air we breathe, especially in times of trial.

*This very week we saw again, on the news, stories of people who, despite horrible loss in the SE Texas floods, could say things like, "I've still got lots to be thankful for. I'm so glad we all got out safely." Sometimes you can see the astonishment on the reporters' faces as the people say things like, "We were thinking of moving our business anyway, so now we will" or "Well,*

*we didn't have anything to begin with, now by God's grace, we have a chance to do things right.*" Their faith is in a God who is the giver of gifts, a God who is good to those in need or misfortune, who makes a way for those who think there is no way. Their faith is in a God who continues to give them Hope.

Hope...that is what it's all about. It's why we're able to praise at all times. Our comfort and consolation, our sustenance rests on the fact that we have been given hope. As Jurgen Moltmann says, *"Hope is when our future in God informs our present. It's when we can expect the things that God has promised."*<sup>3</sup> Love IS stronger than hate. Life WILL prevail over death. Justice WILL someday roll down like the waters. Every tear WILL BE washed away! Evil WILL not have the last word. The psalmist was standing on such hope when he wrote, *"in God's kingdom there will be no barren women, they will have a household full with the joy of children. The poor will be raised up and given a seat among nobles."* The OT prophet, Habakkuk, likely a contemporary of this psalmist, similarly wrote in hope, as he saw the chariots of the Chaldeans coming to sack Jerusalem, his city that had been under siege for so long, *"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls,<sup>18</sup> yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior."* (Hab 3:17-19) Hope....the EXPECTATION of what God has promised.

*Rev. Dr. Thomas Long tells a story about the French war hero and head of state, Charles de Gaulle and his wife, Yvonne. They were the parents of Anne, a child with Down's syndrome. Every day, regardless of what was going on in the affairs of state, de Gaulle would come home and play tenderly with his child. Then, he and Yvonne, would put her to bed. Yvonne would often say, "Oh, Charles, why couldn't she have been like the others? I have prayed so often that she could have been like the others." Anne died before reaching full adulthood, and the family had a private graveside mass. When the mass was over, Yvonne was reluctant to leave*

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<sup>3</sup>Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 6.

*the grave, reluctant to leave her beloved daughter. Charles rested his hand on Yvonne's arm and said to her, "Come, Yvonne, Now, she is like the others."*<sup>4</sup>

Yes, the psalmist knew about hope, and for this reason, he called for worship of our King from sunrise to sunset. And we can, in fact, realistically do that. I love what the great evangelist, Tony Compolo, once said, *"Our destiny in eternity is to join our voices in heaven's great choir. That means the Church is one long, lifetime choir rehearsal. We are to rehearse in such a way that in eternity we'll know the right tune and we will join our different voices as one, and we shall raise the roof of heaven with our praise."*<sup>5</sup> Yes, we can sing together and do all the other things we do when we praise and worship our God. For it's what we were created to do...in sunshine and in rain, when the sky is blue and when it's grey, when things are going well and when things are going poorly, when we are receiving good gifts, and when we are facing difficult loss.

You know this. I've seen you here, worshipping only weeks after you've lost loved ones, but yet still you're here in the embracing company of the family of faith, praising God. I've seen you here, worshipping when you've just moved to town, having had little sleep, living out of suitcases, but yet, you're here. I've seen you here, when you're weak and tired and it's hard to move, when illness or age has made it such an effort, but yet, you're choosing to worship in the uplifting presence of the body of Christ. I've seen you here, despite the exhaustion, bringing your little children, teaching them to worship, raising them in the path that is right. How that honors God. How all of this, honors our God on High...because this is what we were created to do. It is our destiny.

One day, friends, the joyful praise that we offer here, regardless of our situation, sunny or gray, that joyful praise will be ours for all eternity. Let us then let the Lord's name be praised today, tomorrow, and forever, from the rising to the setting of the sun. Hallelujah, Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Amen!

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Long. *"What Shall We Say? Evil, Suffering and the Crisis of Faith."* (Grand Rapids: W. B Eerdmans; 2011), 151.

<sup>5</sup> Tony Compolo. Quoted in Will Willimon. *"Servants of Praise"* <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/9668/september-22-2019-servants-of-praise> (accessed 9-20-19).