

Praise the Lord!
Psalm 150
November 21, 2021 – Center Harbor Congregational Church
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Praise God in the sanctuary, the psalm says; praise God in all of Creation; praise God because God has done amazing things. Praising God is an act of pure joy. Praising God is not quiet. It's noisy. It is exuberant, and this psalm tells us to praise God with all that we are and with whatever instruments we have at hand. I sometimes wonder if we are a little shy about doing that.

When I was at the Meredith church, one of my responsibilities each month was to visit Golden View nursing home and offer a communion service. One month we had a large crowd – twenty folks! I have to tell you that I love visiting with elders one-on-one, but I was always a little challenged when I prepared a worship service for the patients there, because some are there for physical rehabilitation following surgery, and many others are living with dementia and other cognitive impairments. It's a really wide range, and it is challenging to create a service that is meaningful for everyone in the room. What I learned is that the songs we sing and the familiar bits of liturgy are meaningful to everyone because they echo something deep inside us, even if we have lost track of other bits of ourselves. Familiar prayers remain with us. Pieces of scripture remain. The old hymns remain.

So, this particular week, I read Psalm 150, and then said a prayer, and I began a very short reflection. When I got to the end of the psalm, I read, "Let everything that breathes praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!" From the back of the room, I heard a woman's voice: "... and pass the ammunition," she said. Throughout my brief prayer, we could all hear her humming, searching for the tune to that song, dredging it up from some deep place in her memory.

As I began my reflection, the song finally burst out of her: Praise the Lord, and pass the ammunition. Over and over again, sort of quietly at first, then louder and louder. She never quite found her way to the end of the song, so she kept circling back to the beginning, as though illustrating exactly what I was saying in real time. It was a joyful noise, and it called on this patient's deep, long-ago memories that the phrase "Praise the Lord" had triggered. In her song, she brought everything she had to the table, and I felt joy in that moment.

When you praise God, the psalm says, you just want to sing and dance. Feel the praise of God rising up in you so you can't help singing and moving around because God has done amazing things.

Sometimes I think Congregationalists are maybe just a little stiff, when we sing hymns. It's like we are working really hard not to feel the emotion that is behind many of them. But the psalms tell us that when we praise God, we should be genuinely joyful about it. The joy of loving and thanking and praising God should fill us so completely that it spills out into the music we make and inspires us to move around a little. Even New England Congregationalists in traditional white church houses can dance a little when the Spirit moves us!

The psalm also tells us to praise God with whatever instruments we have at hand. Praise God with trumpets and cymbals, it says. Praise God with stringed instruments: violins and lyres and guitars. Praise God with electric basses and acoustic guitars and ukuleles. Praise God with tambourines and drums. Praise God with a steel drum and a kettle drum and a snare drum and a pencil marking rhythm on your desk. Praise God with a pipe organ and a piano.

Make a racket praising God. Never mind the person in the next pew. Praise God anyway, and make a joyful noise about it.

Praise God out of sheer thankfulness for all God's blessings in your life. Bring everything you have, everything that is in you, your whole self to your praise of God. So, take a risk. Let the joy of praising of God burst out of you in joyful song and maybe even joyful dance.

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Amen