

Psalm 103

Of David.

- ¹ Praise the LORD, my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
- ² Praise the LORD, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
- ³ who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
- ⁴ who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with **love and compassion**,
- ⁵ who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
- ⁶ The LORD works righteousness
and justice for all the oppressed.
- ⁷ He made known his ways to Moses,
his deeds to the people of Israel:
- ⁸ **The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.**
- ⁹ He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
- ¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.
- ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
- ¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
- ¹³ As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;
- ¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.
- ¹⁵ The life of mortals is like grass,
they flourish like a flower of the field;

¹⁶the wind blows over it and it is gone,
and its place remembers it no more.

¹⁷***But from everlasting to everlasting***
the LORD's love is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children's children—

¹⁸with those who keep his covenant
and remember to obey his precepts.

¹⁹The LORD has established his throne in heaven,
and his kingdom rules over all.

²⁰Praise the LORD, you his angels,
you mighty ones who do his bidding,
who obey his word.

²¹Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts,
you his servants who do his will.

²²Praise the LORD, all his works
everywhere in his dominion.

Praise the LORD, my soul.

Psalm 47: 1-2, 5-7

¹*Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy.*

²For the LORD Most High is awesome, the great King over all the earth.

⁵God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the LORD amid the sounding of trumpets. ⁶Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. ⁷For God is the King of all the earth; *sing to him a psalm of praise.*

Psalm 63:3-5

³Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.

⁴I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name *I will lift up my hands.*

⁵I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods, with *singing lips my mouth will praise you.*

Psalm 141:2

May my prayer be set before you like incense;
may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.

Psalms: The Songs of Our Lives

Rev. Lynell M. Caudillo

Worship Aerobics: Psalm 103, and selected Psalms September 2, 2018

When something really good happens--when you receive good news--what is the first thing do you do?

Tell someone...pick up the phone--send a text or email--shout for joy?

Recently I was on the receiving end of such a phone call when my sister called to tell me that my nephew, who has been doing a paid summer internship, told that employer that he'd been offered a permanent job with another company. When he told them, they countered with a matching offer--so now he had two positions from which to choose!

This is a really big deal. Long story short, for about 14 months he's had numerous interviews, including second interviews, but always came in second! Now, he's got two bonafide full time job offers, and he gets to choose!! Praise the Lord!

When prayers are answered, when we receive good news--we want to share it with others. Hopefully, we want to give credit where credit is due, and give praise to God!

About 6 years ago I participated in a conference for Presbyterian women in leadership in Rwanda. About 60 women gathered from the countries in central Africa in Kigali, Rwanda for a week-long conference. Among the many things that impressed me during my time there, was that the women were always singing, clapping and dancing.

They sang while waiting in line in the cafeteria. They sang while on the bus as we went on several "field trips". They sang of course, during worship.

What you need to know is that, without exception, all of these women served in very challenging circumstances—some, where war and AIDS were taking its toll. Many lived in situations touched by violence, poverty, disease, lack of things we consider basic necessities. But also, without exception, these women sang praises to God because they had experienced God's faithfulness in the midst of these often dire situations. So they sang with gusto, ever ready to lift their voices in praise and song.

You know the expression that Presbyterians are the Frozen Chosen? We are so sedate in our worship. However the ancient Israelites were not. Quite the opposite. As we have spent about 8 weeks considering various psalms, we see that some--songs of ascent-- were songs sung as the people trudged up the hill to the temple. They were singing and walking. Sometimes they were clapping, and perhaps, even dancing!

Frequently in the psalms we find the following expressions: "lift up your hands/voice/heart". We are encouraged to praise our God...with our voices/with musical instruments/with shouts and songs of joy and jubilation. We are to clap our hands and jump for joy! In other words, we are to worship God with the *whole of ourselves*: body, mind, and spirit.

Why? because sometimes just talking is not enough--"When words fail, music speaks" (Hans Christian Andersen). And when music alone is not enough, we must move.

How many of you have been to a sporting event- a Seahawks or Mariner game--when the home team scores, does the crowd sit in silence? Of course not! Everyone is on their feet, clapping, fist-bumping, cheering and shouting as loud as they can!

So, the psalmists would encourage us to PRAISE the LORD in a similar fashion--however undignified it may seem to us--it pleases God that we can praise whole-heartedly, with every fiber of our being!

During Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the crowds were cheering and shouting: " Hosana!! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

When the Pharisees took offense, and told Jesus to get his people under control, do you remember what Jesus said to them?

"I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." (Luke 19:40)

Centuries prior, the prophet Isaiah wrote poetically that God's people ...
"... will go out in joy
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and hills
will burst into song [before you],
and all the trees of the field
will clap their hands. " Isaiah 55:12

While metaphorical, these are expressions that convey that even creation itself gives praise to God and points to the Creator, by its very existence!

So we are encouraged to praise God--using our voices, hands, and bodies, yes, the whole of our beings! So just for the sake of making God smile this morning, I want us to try something. If you are able, I'd like you to stand with me and let's give God a standing ovation, shall we? (Nice!). You can be

seated. Now, let's try just one more thing to give God another smile. Let's try lifting our hands, and shouting "Halleluia". Can we do that? On the count of three...1—2—3! Halleluia! (as we lift our hands up to the Lord). (That wasn't so hard, was it?! Our worship aerobics for the morning!!)

Now let me ask you another question: Do you ever talk to yourself? It's ok, you can tell me. Do you ever talk to yourself??? One advantage of talking to oneself is that you know at least one person is listening!

Psalm 103 begins with the psalmist talking to himself:

1 Praise the Lord, my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
2 Praise the Lord, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—

He begins by reminding himself not to forget all the blessings and benefits he has received from the Lord. In the movie *White Christmas*, Bing Crosby sings: "Count your blessings instead of sheep...?"
That would keep me awake all night! I can't even count that high!!

Recent psychological studies indicate that talking to oneself in a positive way may be an indication of health. Talking to oneself aloud sparks memory and helps individuals clarify thoughts, attend to what is important, and firm up decisions one is contemplating. (G. Engle, "People who talk to themselves aren't crazy", *EliteDaily.com* 7-8-15)

The Psalmist will not be deterred--he goes on essentially to make a list of the "benefits" or "rewards" that are his in knowing the LORD:
For what shall he/we praise God?

Forgiveness...for healing of the soul, for redemption/rescue from the mirey pit (Psalm 40 that Amy preached on last week). For satisfaction, and finally for God's justice made real in the world (v.6)

This reminds the author of Moses--a model of one who experienced the faithfulness of God as he led Israel from Captivity to Freedom.

Surprisingly Yahweh, as portrayed by the psalmist, behaves unexpectedly. In v. 9-14 we hear that Yahweh's way of working and standard of judgement is not like any we expect. We would expect some of our behavior would incur God's anger, but we do not receive it. God responds with stunning generosity and grace, "hesed"/steadfast love. (<http://www.aish.com/tp/i/gl/120696719.html>)

This Hebrew word best characterizes God's relationship to Israel and us in his Covenant love. A covenant is a promise between two parties; for instance, marriage is often referred to as a covenant.

Four times in this psalm, reference is made to this characteristic, God's loving kindness: v.4,8,11,17.

The issue however, is that Israel is repeatedly unfaithful to God through disobedience and yes, worshipping other gods. The covenant promises that the people of Israel make to Yahweh are constantly, repeatedly broken. In a similar way we agree to be God's faithful servants, and yet in a similar way we too break our promises to God through our disobedience and unfaithfulness.

YET God loves us so, and God is ever merciful and ready to forgive (and forget). YET God is ever faithful, always a promise-keeping God, loving Israel and us while we are unfaithful and undeserving.

The result? God shatters all expectations! God does not treat us as we might expect. Rather than responding to our action/inaction, our obedience or disobedience to God's commands, God responds as an exceedingly patient, loving, compassionate parent.

In v. 15-18 we are surprised once again as we would expect God to judge us as we would, that is, according to human standards. Not so! God is utterly unlike us--and for this we can be eternally grateful! Once again the portrait of Yahweh is one of hesed/steadfast love (v.17) a love far from sentiment, but infused with sacrifice, a love freely given, exceedingly generous and transformative for the recipient. God is free of human convention and calculation. (Walter Bruggeman, *The Message of the Psalms*, p. 160-161)

We deserve judgment, but we receive mercy. Righteousness will be satisfied. This is the reality of grace. Therefore, "hesed" however it is translated, stands for the wonder of God's unfailing love for the people God chooses, whether deserving or not. (Mostly, not!)

Is it then any wonder that the psalmist concludes the psalm with an expansive and all-inclusive summons to praise:

all creation--all earthly creatures and heavenly ones are invited--no, commanded--to Praise the Lord!

So...It is ok to clap your hands all you people, shout unto God with a voice of triumph—because God loves us! God Loves YOU! God hears and answers prayers.

Bless the Lord oh my soul, bless the Lord, and forget not all his benefits! Let us pray...