

Great Is the Lord

Joy! God wants to fill our lives with joy. In some of his last words to his disciples, Jesus promised: “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” We read this promise in John 15:11—Jesus’ words after he has shared the Last Supper with his disciples... the night before he died on the cross for our sins. “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”

God wants to fill our lives with joy—the kind of wonderful, overflowing joy we find expressed in Psalm 145, our scripture focus for this morning. However, when we look at our lives, so often we don’t feel that kind of joy in the Lord. It seems like our days go by in a blur of activity—work or school, and family, and taking care of the house & yard, and appointments, and finances, and helping out at the church & in community organizations... Just trying to keep up with everything takes all our energy.

And then, there are the crises we face: with our own health, or family member who is sick, maybe it’s a financial set-back, perhaps it’s a serious problem at school or at work, maybe we’re deeply worried about a family member or friend, maybe a relationship is falling apart, maybe someone close to us dies... There’s so much in life that can leave us feeling empty and alone.

At times like these, it’s good to turn to the Psalms, these beautiful prayer songs we find in the center of our Bible, many of them written by King David over 3000 years ago. The power of the psalms is that while they acknowledge our struggles, they gently turn our attention away from the difficulties of life, and toward God’s presence and power. The psalms invite us to look up, toward God... The psalms help us to replace our natural, human perspective, with a

heavenly, eternal perspective. And this is the source of a deeper joy in the Lord, which can carry us through the rough times and bring expression to the celebrations of our lives.

Now in Psalm 145, we find 3 specific ways to experience God’s joy, and I’d like to look briefly at each one. Here, King David speaks of 3 things which he will do. First of all, he will praise God. This is essential: to praise God. Did you notice the title above Psalm 145? It is: “A Song of Praise.” In Hebrew, “Tehillah”—a song of praise. It’s the only psalm with that title. And immediately, David begins to praise God:

145 I will extol thee, my God and King, and bless thy name for ever and ever.

²Every day I will bless thee, and praise thy name for ever and ever.

We, too, have the opportunity to begin with praise—to express to God our thanksgiving for all the many ways we see God at work in our lives and in the world. Think about it, how could you begin your day with praise?

Each of us have our own way of communicating our praise: we could do it simply by reading Psalm 145 each morning, and letting its words speak for us. Or, we could pray to God in our own words, thanking Him for the blessings we have experienced. We could express our joy in music, listening to a Christian radio station or playlist or youtube video (maybe even singing along) or playing a favorite hymn on the piano, or if you have the gift of dance, expressing your praise through dance. Perhaps you have a prayer journal, and your praise takes the form of writing. Or, you have a camera, and you give thanks through photography... There are many different possibilities, but one thing that all have in common—we begin with praise.

Then, there’s a second thing that King David does. He meditates on God’s works.

In Psalm 145: 5, we read:

On the glorious splendor of thy majesty, and on thy wondrous works, I will meditate.

What does it mean to meditate on God’s wondrous works? It means to take time to think about all that God has done... to set aside at least a few minutes each day, to focus on the amazing signs of God’s activity, to let ourselves be filled with awe and wonder. When we look, we see God’s hand everywhere. Think about creation, the beauty of the world around us. Everything, from the tiny atom to the swirling galaxies, from an ancient elephant to a newborn baby, reflects God’s design, God’s wisdom, power, and love.

Meditate on God’s wondrous works... let’s try that now. I have a 3 minute video to show you. This is a prayer of reflection & confession, written by a United Methodist bishop, Bishop Ken Carter—an opportunity to meditate on God’s wondrous works...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lR18lqm_I0

Earth Day Prayer of Confession

by the Rev. Ken Carter, pastor of Providence UMC, Charlotte, North Carolina

O God, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen:

You place us in your creation, and you command us to care for it.

Your works declare glory and splendor, and you call us to praise and reverence.

Where we have degraded or destroyed earth’s bounty, forgive us.

Where we have taken beauty and majesty for granted, have mercy upon us.

Where we have become estranged from the creatures with whom we share this planet,
grant us your peace.

Renew us in the waters of baptism, refresh us with the winds of your spirit,
and sustain us with the bread of life.

In the name of Jesus Christ, and for the sake of the new creation, we pray. Amen.

We see God's hand in creation around us, but also in history, and most of all, in the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. When we meditate on God's wondrous works, we especially focus on Jesus' life & teaching, his death on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, and his resurrection on Easter morning, opening to us the gift of eternal life in heaven. Through Jesus, our hearts are filled with joy.

Thus, King David begins with praise, and continues with meditation, and then, he ends with declaration. In verses 6 & 7, we read:

⁶Men shall proclaim the might of thy terrible acts, and I will declare thy greatness.

⁷They shall pour forth the fame of thy abundant goodness & shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.

You see, our joy is enriched when we tell others about God, when we share the ways we have seen God at work in our lives.

And in particular, King David urges us to tell children & youth about our experiences of God's presence and love.

One generation shall laud thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts. (145:4)

What's one thing you could do, to help children & youth learn more about God? That's what we promised this morning, in the baptismal ceremony—that for each of the children & youth (and adults) being baptized today.... and for all those who have been baptized in the past, we would surround them with love, so they would be established in the faith, and confirmed & strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.” And if each of us committed to one specific action—think what a difference that would make! “One generation shall laud thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts.”

And so, King David shows us 3 things that are necessary: praise, meditation, and declaration. And in these ways, God fills our life with joy. Amen.