

November 27, 2016
Sermon for First Sunday in Advent
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Psalm 96

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Psalm 96 (ESV)

- ¹ Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth!
- ² Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.
- ³ Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!
- ⁴ For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods.
- ⁵ For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens.
- ⁶ Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
- ⁷ Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength!
- ⁸ Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts!
- ⁹ Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!
- ¹⁰ Say among the nations, “The Lord reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.”
- ¹¹ Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
- ¹² let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
- ¹³ before the Lord, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior,
Jesus Christ!

Amen.

In 1952 the Christian writer J. B. Phillips wrote a short book by the name

“Your God is Too Small.”

In the book, he challenged his readers to see God as so much more than a smiling
old grandfather or some type of cosmic distant policeman.

Too many people put God in a box that is safe and manageable, to be called upon in
certain times of life, but not to get in the way of who we want to be and how we want to live.

But God is bigger, so much larger than what we realize. He is the Almighty, the Creator of
all. His ways are beyond our understanding. We can use words from confirmation class like
omnipotent or omniscience to get at this truth, but sometimes songs can help us connect to
God’s Word. There is a recent song by the Christian band Addison Road called “What Do I
Know of Holy?”. In this song the band put it in a way that helped me see this bigger God we
worship. Here are the lyrics: “I caught a glimpse of who You might be. The slightest hint of You
brought me to my knees.” Earlier in the song, the singers asked, “What do I know of You who
spoke me into motion?” God spoke us into motion. And not just us, but all creation. From the
motion of the electrons in a molecule to the waves on an ocean to the wheat swaying in a field
to hands lifted up in praise, God spoke everything into motion. He is the Creator and even the
slightest hint of who He is brings us to our knees.

Our God is huge, so praise for Him also needs to be huge. In fact, Psalm 96 is calling us
to sing praises to this Creator of all. *“Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the
earth” “Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory
among the nations”.*

And not just us, but all creation is to rejoice and be glad. The heavens, earth and sea. The mountains, fields and trees. All sing praises because the Lord reigns. He is ruler of all. And His salvation is for all creation.

Some people don't like our sermon hymn, Earth and All Stars. "Clashing hammers, pounding hammers. Boiling test tubes"? Really? But I think we are limiting how God's creation is praising Him. They are part of His creation too, right? The Psalm talks of trees singing praise to God. But how does a tree praise the Lord? Or a mountain? Or a rock? Or a test tube?

Perhaps we're thinking too small when it comes to praise. Praise is more than just singing a few words during a worship service. Praise is also the sounds and sights of being and doing just what God created a mountain or bird or tree or hammer or cymbal, any of these things, doing what they are created to be and do.

Imagine for a moment the most memorable scenes of God's creation. I remember a family vacation. We got into our truck, my brothers and I in the camper shell and my parents in the front and we started driving north through the panhandle and through New Mexico. Many parts of North Texas look awful flat. Even going through most of New Mexico, a lot of flat lands. But appearances can be deceiving. As we drove, we were actually climbing towards Colorado. It's a gentle climb. But then Colorado came into view and we could see the mountains. The closer you get, the more you realize just how majestic those Rocky Mountains are. Then finally you drive through them, trying to peer out the window at how high and huge they really are. Incredible!

Perhaps you've stood on the rim of the Grand Canyon and looked down. Perhaps you've walked along the beach and stared out to the horizon. Perhaps you've put your eye to a microscope and seen the intricacies of a skin cell or even just some onion skin.

Now think about it, God sees all this all the time from every possible point of view. The Christian philosopher, Dallas Willard, wrote that God is the most joyous being in the universe.

He says that we pay money to get a tank with a few tropical fish and enjoy looking at their beauty as they swim around.

But God has oceans and seas of fish which He constantly enjoys.

We might enjoy a song or some music, but God simply experiences all that is good and beautiful and right. Mr. Willard says, "All of the good and beautiful things from which we occasionally drink tiny droplets of soul-exhilarating joy, God continuously experiences in all their breath and depth and richness." (Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* [HarperOne, 1998], 62–64.)

Creation praises God by being and doing what He created it to be and do.

The sound of a three-year-old laughing when his grandpa chases him down the hallway. The young calf in the barnyard jumping and playing in the springtime. The birds singing in the early morning hours outside an open bedroom window. The rustling of the leaves of corn in a field ripe for harvest. The bubbling water running down a mountainside after a summer rain. The joy as a dog fetches a stick in a park.

All these sights and sounds are music to God's ears and beautiful in His eyes. He is the most joyous being in the universe.

Except these sights and sounds are too often silenced and turned into something ugly. I see deer on the side of the road on a regular basis. After being hit by cars their bodies were broken and bloated. Blood seeped onto the road.

Pollution has dirtied the skies and contaminated the water. Whole species of animals are extinct, no more to be seen or heard in their created wonder.

Fires rage through drought stricken forests and once majestic trees look red in flames and then turn black and die. Hurricanes and tornadoes destroy wildlife and crops just as much as they destroy homes and cars.

We've all had much loved pets. Cats or dogs, hamsters and even snakes.

We are for them and love them. Enjoying their company, hearing them make noises and do the things that they were created to do. But sometimes those pets get sick, they waste away and die. And we miss them as our beloved pet is taken away from us all too soon.

Even more so, many of us have had a time in our lives when the tears can run down our cheeks when the visit to the doctor bring news we do not want to hear.

Romans 8 puts this ugliness and silencing of God's creation into a few words. *"For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now."* Romans 8:20–22 (ESV)

How can Psalm 96 call us to praise the Lord when so much ugliness, groaning and silencing of His creation is all around us?

Because of God's salvation. We can praise and sing, because not only is God so big, not only is praise so big, but so is His salvation.

"Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day."

Don't make God's salvation too small. It's not just about ending up in heaven.

It's not just seeing loved ones once again. It's not just being with Jesus for all eternity.

Yes, those wonderful blessings are a part of God's salvation. But His salvation is even bigger.

In Romans 8 creation hopes for the day it will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

All creation is waiting for the redemption of our bodies. And that redemption of all creation began when stones sang out in praise. Yes, stones.

Go back to a joyous day for Jesus and the disciples, that day of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The disciples are happy as: *"Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road,*

*and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.*⁹ *And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"* Matthew 21:8–9 (ESV)

I can almost picture the scene as we are told in Luke 19 that: *"some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples."*⁴⁰ *He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."* Luke 19:39–40 (ESV)

Stones crying out might still sound strange but not quite a week later, the Pharisees got their wish. They silenced Jesus. No more words came out of his mouth when He died on the cross and His body was set in a tomb. They chased His followers away. And they hid, quiet and alone, in an upper room, afraid for their lives. Yes, the praises had stopped.

But then the stones cried out. Yes, the stones. On Easter morning, think of the sound they made? Stone against stone. [I suggest getting two small, gray patio stones and rubbing]

The stone in front of the tomb rolling back and rubbing against the stone tomb. The grinding sound is just what noise a stone is to make when a tomb is opened. What gives some of the first sounds of praise on Easter morning?

The stones do! As Jesus rises from the dead and the hope of redemption is born. Now we return to today. Yes, the redemption of all creation begins with Jesus. What happened to His body, now alive and glorified, is the hope of not just you and me and all believers. No, it is also a bigger hope. It is the hope of all creation. All the earth and sea and heavens, all the trees and mountains and fields, look forward to the salvation Jesus will bring on the last day. All of creation waits in eager anticipation for the day when Jesus will return and the ugliness, groaning, and silence will be replaced with the most joyous chorus of praise ever heard.

At Christmas time, an incredible piece of musical praise is Handel's Messiah, especially the Hallelujah Chorus. Listen to the words:

Hallelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth, Hallelujah!

The Kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever, Hallelujah! King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, and he shall reign forever and ever, Hallelujah!

Now imagine the birds are singing along with the sopranos. The cows are in the bass line. Elephants trumpet out, The fields are waving. The mountains have never stood more majestic. Deer run and leap without fear. A cat purrs so loudly, as a young girl holds it, that the Lord smiles. And the rocks like cymbals repeat the sounding joy of the resurrected Savior who has returned as Lord of Lord and King of Kings, for He shall reign forever and forever.

Now that's a "ginormous" salvation.

That's our God who is bigger than we can imagine. And you know what? He did it all for YOU!!

That's the sound of praise we look forward to, but also the sound of praise we are already singing. Here in church, of course, but also as you sing in your car, on your tractor, in your office, each and every day! Even in the doctor's office or the funeral parlor. Yes, sometimes with tears in our eyes, but in the knowledge of salvation wrought for you by the babe that we are waiting for in Bethlehem.

We join with His creation in being and doing what He created and redeemed us to do . As we sing His praises today, tomorrow and the rest of our days on this earth, and even unto eternity with faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

Sermon Outline

Praising God's Salvation

Psalm 96

- I. God is bigger, so much larger than what we realize.
- II. Creation praises God by being and doing what He created it to be and do.
- III. We can praise and sing, because not only is God so big, not only is praise so big, but so is His salvation.