

February 6th 2022 Psalm 146

Theme: Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Readings: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-4, Psalm 146

Sentence: "I will praise the Lord all my life. I will sing praise to God as long as I live."
Psalm 146:2

Intro

Good morning everyone. When I was thinking about what psalm to speak on today there were so many possibilities: it is Waitangi Day; it is AAW Sunday; and it is the 70th anniversary of the accession of our Queen, Queen Elizabeth, to the throne - and I considered all of these. But, important as these are, I kept getting led back to one word – praise. Did you know that in our English translations the word 'praise' occurs over two hundred times in the book of Psalms, and the psalmist calls on us to 'praise the LORD' or announces his intention to do so, at least one hundred and fifty times. Not only are there three distinct sections of praise psalms (Pss 113-118- Egyptian Hallel; 120-136 – Great Hallel; 146-150 – Final Hallel), 'praise the LORD' is a thread that runs through the whole book.

So this morning I would like to focus on one of the final group of praise psalms, Psalm 146, as we explore why praise and worship are so important; why God is worthy of our praise; and what it means for us to praise God as individuals, as part of a church family and within the whole community of creation.

Before we do that, let's pray:

Lord take these words of mine and make them your words. Please use them to challenge and encourage us in our Christian walk. Draw us closer to yourself and renew us in your image, we pray, that we may be living witnesses of your grace and glory.. Amen

So here is an outline of what we shall be looking at this morning.

A Call to worship
personal
congregational
all creation
The importance of praise
Why we praise
Who we praise
How we praise
A destiny of praise

A call to worship

Praise and worship is what we were created for, now and for eternity. As the psalmist says: "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!" (Psalm 150:6)

So, Psalm 146 begins with a call to worship: Alleluia – hallelu Yah - praise the LORD; or bless the LORD. And when LORD is written in capital letters as it is here it is translating the word Yah or Yahweh, which means something like: 'I am,' or 'the One who is.' Yahweh is the one self-existing being, the source of all that is; the one eternal God who has always existed. But Yahweh is also the God who had heard the

cries of his people in Egypt; who rescued them; and entered into a covenant relationship with them. He is now their God and they are his people. All of this lies behind the simple encouragement to Praise the Lord- we praise God for who He is and for all that He has done for us.

And I say 'we' because the verb is plural – the psalmist is calling on everyone to praise God. Most likely this psalm was used in the context of temple worship and the leader is calling on the whole congregation to praise their God.

Personal worship

But the psalmist is also calling on each individual to follow his example in praising God. He says: "Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, my soul. I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. (Psalm 146:1-2)

It is his determined intent to praise God every day of his life. This is not a fleeting response made when he is caught up in a wonderful atmosphere of praise and worship but a lifelong commitment - on good days and bad.

Listen to his heart cry, his passion for praise:

Psalm 42:1-2

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.
² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

Psalm 108:1-2

My heart, O God, is steadfast; I will sing and make music with all my soul.
² Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn.

Psalm 92:1-3

It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High,
² proclaiming your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night,
³ to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp.

Morning and evening: the psalmist starts and ends his day with praise.

We may not have the musical talent of the psalmist but we can certainly follow his example by starting the day with words of praise and, at the end of the day, look back, to count our blessings, and to praise God.

And a personal commitment to praise God daily is not just about me. A few years ago I went on a course for worship leaders up in Auckland. After a whole week of teaching and workshops, and experiencing many different ways of worshipping and musical styles, we concluded that the most important thing was – the people. If the people were a worshipping people the rest didn't matter. To enter fully into a time of worship all that was needed was a group of worshippers. Our individual worship blended together to create something that was greater than its parts. We're better together, as the saying goes. There are many things we can do on our own – pray or read the Bible for example, but there is something special and different about joining together to praise and worship God.

Congregational worship

As we saw, Praise the Lord is plural – we’re all meant to join in. After all, most of the psalms were designed to be sung during temple worship. And that included more than just singing. Praise the Lord can also mean make music to the LORD.

Listen to some of these descriptions of worship and praise:

Psalm 47:1 Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy.

Psalm 47:5⁵ God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the LORD amid the sounding of trumpets.

Psalm 150:3-6³ Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre,

⁴ praise him with tambourine and dancing,

praise him with the strings and pipe,

⁵ praise him with the clash of cymbals,

praise him with resounding cymbals.

⁶ Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.

Doesn't sound very Anglican does it! Nevertheless, our Prayer Book services start with a call to worship and in the BCP one of the reasons for gathering together is 'to set forth his (God's) most worthy praise.'

Psalm 100 says: Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

² Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

Praise is the key to entering into God's presence. When we worship, God draws near; we can meet with Him for He is enthroned on the praise of his people (Ps 22:3). And when we encounter God we meet the one who can heal, deliver, save and bless. The psalmist is acting as God's messenger, presenting God's invitation to enter in and draw near.

I wonder if we fully realise what is happening as we worship together on a Sunday. Dave Bilbrough, whose songs we sing sometimes, says: we may be meeting in familiar acts of Sunday worship but we "always need to be reminded that we're stepping into something far greater. We are aligning ourselves with the things of heaven as we worship."

In the Bible, God's people sing when they are confronted with spiritual or physical battles, when they need God to break into seemingly impossible situations. Do you remember the story of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron 20:20-23)? When he and his army were vastly outnumbered, God told him to place singers at the front of the army. As they advanced and began to sing and praise God, the opposing armies fought among themselves; all that was left for Jehoshaphat's men to do to carry off the plunder!

When we worship strongholds are broken down, Martin Luther said: "The devil hates a singing Christian."

Creation's praise

But Psalm 146:6 also reminds us that: "God is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them." Throughout the psalms we see creation praising its Creator.

Psalm 19:1¹

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. " In Psalm 148 the psalmist calls on mountains, hills, sea creatures and much else to praise their creator. And in Revelation 5 we see the new creation continuing to praise God.

What is praise and why is it important?

At one level, praise is our response to anything we find amazing whether it is a beautiful sunset or a good cup of coffee. It is our expression of appreciation and delight in the object of our praise that we naturally want to share with others. I often call John to come and see a beautiful sunset. But for God's people we praise God above all else. St Augustine wrote:

"Great are you, O Lord, and worthy of high praise. You stir us up to take delight in your praise; for you have made us for yourself and our heart is restless till it finds its rest in you."

For Augustine, to be human is to long for God – a longing only fulfilled in the act of worshipping God. One cannot be fully human if one doesn't worship God. That's a pretty amazing statement isn't it. Some of you may know the Westminster Catechism which says that our chief end or purpose is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever.

We are created to be worshippers but who or what we worship is crucially important.

Who we praise

We are called to worship God alone. In the first commandment God states: "You shall have no other gods before me." Jesus himself told us: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your souls and with all your mind." (Matt 22:37).

Paul, in Romans 1:18-32, spells out the terrible consequences of choosing to worship idols, created things, rather than the Creator who is the source of all life. In our culture there are many things that people choose to put first in their lives – and we at times do the same. But God longs for us to sing to Him because he knows that if we are not singing to Him we are singing to someone or something else, and ultimately that is not good for us.

When we look at Psalm 146 we see something more of the God we worship. He is the one we can rely on. Unlike the capricious gods of the Greeks and Romans he is faithful in looking after His people. And unlike human rulers whose plans come to nothing when they die, or are voted out of office, or side-lined by Covid, our God is eternal, his plans are never ultimately thwarted and there will be a final righting of all wrongs. Our God is a God of compassion and justice and surely worthy of our worship.

How we praise

Worship is also important because when we worship we are putting everything back into its rightful place. We are exalting God to the highest place and placing His will and His ways above our own.

Dave Bilbrough again: “so as we declare who God is we renew our minds with the truths of His character and power.That vision begins to work its way down into our daily lives, altering the way we interact with people, changing the way we see the world and increasing our compassion for the lost and the poor. Because we see who God is and witness His active presence in the world, we begin to respond like Jesus by doing what we see the Father doing.” (Worship and the presence of God p22)

And that is just what we see happening in Psalm 146:7-9. The psalmist praises God because:

⁷ He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free,

⁸ the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous.

⁹ The LORD watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

Jesus came to do the same Luke 4:18; and we continue this work.. Remember the words of Tom Wright: “Those who are put right with God through the cross are to be putting-right people for the world.”

So, we praise God for who he is, and because of who he is we seek to serve him not just in church on Sundays but in our daily lives as we live in obedience to him. Romans 12:1-2 calls us to not only offer a sacrifice of praise but to be a living sacrifice, offering up our lives to do His will.

For some of us that may mean choosing to put others and their needs before our own. For some of us that obedience will mean choosing to worship even when things are not good with us. For some it involves good old-fashioned discipline – good old-fashioned turning up week-by-week-and-lifting-your-voice-in –praise to God worship.

But this is what we were created for. It is our role now and for eternity.

For worship is an eternal event: it transcends time, touching prehistory with the worship of God by legions of angels before God spoke the world into being. It is the worship of creation – the worship of the mountains, rivers, trees and birds of Aotearoa NZ before ever humans landed here. It is an eschatological event that takes us to the end of the present age and on into the next as we are gathered around the eternal throne, worshipping and enjoying God for ever.

I'd like us to finish by saying together Revelation 5:11-14

Revelation 5:11-14 (NIV2011)

¹¹ Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders.

¹² In a loud voice they were saying: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!”

¹³ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!”

¹⁴ The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshipped.

Amen.

You know every so often in the psalms we come across the word selah. We don't really know what it means but some people have suggested that it is a pause for reflection. So let's pause now and ask ourselves:

What is God saying to me?

What do I need to do about it?