

Hymn Sing Meditation
Psalm 148
December 30, 2018

Reverend Kristie W. Finley
First Presbyterian Church
Lake Forest, Illinois

Psalm 148
Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!

Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his host!

Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars!

Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for he commanded and they were created.
He established them forever and ever;
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

Praise the Lord from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps,
fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling his command!

Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!
Wild animals and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds!

Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!
Young men and women alike,
old and young together!

Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.
He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his faithful,
for the people of Israel who are close to him.

Praise the Lord!

On this first Sunday after Christmas, this lavish song of Praise to God is an appropriate response to God for the gift of Jesus' birth. As we hear of the Lord of creation and author of salvation entering the world and our lives in a unique and direct way, how can we do anything but sing praise. A note from Amy Morrison Hendrik after her father's memorial service again reminded me of this when she wrote, "how can we help but sing our faith?" On this Sunday, which is traditionally a Hymn Sing service, is a good time to reflect on how much our music forms us and preaches to us.

I wonder how often we take notice of the words of scripture, outside of the Old and New Testament scripture readings that we use weekly in worship? Psalm 148 is used for our call to worship this morning, and it can be heard in worship most Sunday's as we sing the Doxology – where we sing our gratitude to God after the collection plates are brought forward. We will be singing it this morning.

This Psalm is an invitation to wonder at the astonishing beauty of God that we see in creation and stands in contrast to the mechanical and utilitarian constructs of nature. I have an activity for us to do over the next

few days. We are fortunate that the bulletin is laid out with such a large margin to the right of the Psalm. Throughout the week I invite you to read Psalm 148 and connect actual experiences and places you have visited. All the people, places, animals, everything we find in creation. In the margin, write those thoughts. When you read, Praise him, all his angels, does the sight of the angels processing down the aisle during the children's pageant come to mind? What is the name of a saint in your life? When I read "mountains and all hills" –I am reminded of the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania where I spent several contemplative retreats – they are gorgeous and God's presence surrounded me. Or as I read, "Young men and women alike, old and young together" I think of our Festival Sundays, or Christmas Eve services here, when we all worship together.

As we approach the end of the year, a time when we traditionally make resolutions for the coming year, it is important to reflect back on where we have witnessed God throughout God's creation, through each encounter and experience in our lives, and to wonder about where God might be leading you in the year ahead.

After you have read through the Psalm a few times and jotted down your remembrances, pray the Psalm again as praise to our God who loves us so much that we were gifted with such beauty and wonder. So loved that God came to join us and rescue us in Jesus.

Our first hymn this morning – Let All Creation’s Wonder, written in 2001 by Martin Leckebusch, is based on Psalm 148, and is an example of how through music, God opens us to the wonder of the unpredictable. Martin Leckebusch was educated and lives in the UK. He works in the world of Information Technology – IT, and has written hundreds of beautiful published hymns, of which a majority are based on the Psalms. I find this intriguing because Martin has gifts in several areas, and navigates them all. He is an example to us that being religiously trained is not a prerequisite to offer God’s word. God’s work happens through all of us, no matter what our profession. Martin also captured my attention with his insight into the differences in our everyday language and that of our religious language.

Examples such as save, splendor, blessing, cleanse, and magnify, our Sunday words, as opposed to our weekday words of rescue, brilliance, benefit, wash, and applaud.

Our religious words can be a barrier for those outside the faith or for new Christians. Martin's work pays close attention to this. As we strive to be open and welcoming, insider language is a hurdle to be understood and cleared. After all, the great theologian Karl Barth, when asked by a student why he believed, reportedly answered by singing, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

If we confess that existence and living is dependent on God, then our singing praise is to express our abundant gratitude. Praise and gratitude as confession and testimony lead to invitation and encouragement to others, part of our vision of sending well equipped disciples into the world.

If you feel you have a hard time finding the words to invite or encourage, you might consider reading through the hymnal, or recalling a hymn that speaks deeply to you of your faith. The mind grabs hold of

music and helps with recall. When you visit a person with dementia or memory recall issues, you might be surprised to hear them sing every word to the old hymns, the words and tunes stick with us. These fragments of scripture found in our hymns might come to you easier, actually give you the words to invite or encourage – and no, you don't have to sing them, unless you are one of our gifted choir members.

We end our services with songs of praise to send us out into the world to do Christ's work, and here Psalm 148, set in the midst of the final psalms in the Book, does the same. Offering gratitude to God for all that has been given, yesterday, today and tomorrow. Amen.

Since music is not my gift, Tom Tropp, whose gift it is, will lead us in our hymn sing.