

Ending the Year with Praise

Stanton Reformed Church

December 29, 2019

Focus: The Psalms end with praise.

Function: Wrapping up 2019, and even the last decade, we can focus our attention on that which is praiseworthy.

Do/Think: Reflect on praiseworthy things; engage the examen.

Psalm 148 is a Praise Psalm. Part of it are used in Jewish daily prayers. Praise comes before petition. In other words, words from psalms like this are to be said before we begin asking God for whatever it is that we need.

Praise first.

Then petition.

It's a fairly comprehensive psalm of praise -
Everything gives praise to God.

The heavens.

The angels.

The sun and moon and stars.

The waters that existed in the beginning of creation - the waters that were first separated to create the dome.

The natural laws of creation are to praise God.

The sea monsters.

Fire, jhail, snow, storms...

Mountains

Fruit trees,

Animals - all of them, those that creep and those that fly.

And then we reach humans -
Kings and everyone
Princes, rulers,
Young
Old
Men
Women
Everything praises the Lord.
Why?
Only God's majesty is over earth and heaven.

Praise the Lord.

What is praise exactly?

Is it gratitude? Is it thanksgiving?

Gratitude is the readiness to show appreciation.

Thankfulness is awareness and appreciation of a benefit.

So gratitude and thanksgiving are similar.

What about praise?

Praise is the expression of approval, commendation or admiration.

Now that's different. Praise is an expression of approval. It's applauding something or someone. It's commending an action, an event, a talent.

Praise is admiration of something or someone.

Do you know the magazine, the Week? It's a fantastic collection of not just the news of the week but how the news was presented from various points of view.

Anyway, at the beginning of the magazine each week, there is a section labeled, "It wasn't all that bad."

In this section, they highlight stories that praise something. They pick things that have been reported that admire, approve or commend something or someone.

Listen to these -

Harman Singh, a 22 year old Sikh man, removed his turban to place it under the head of a young boy who had just been hit by a car. By religious law, he ought to only remove his turban in private.

Off-duty U.S. Army Capt. Steve Voglezon came upon the scene of a head-on collision. Through the flames he could see an elderly couple trapped inside. He smashed the car's windows and pulled William and Kathleen Thompson to safety. He was wearing a Captain America T-shirt at the time.

For four years, A'Ja Booth, a Detroit high school student, underwent kidney dialysis. She wrote a story about her experience and her gym teacher, Nadirah Muhammad read the story and decided she wanted to donate one of her kidneys. Five months after the successful transplant, they returned to school, walking hand-in-hand. They were met with cheers and confetti.

Praise – they were met with praise!

When you think back on this year, 2019, what is praiseworthy?

What has happened in your life, in the life of our church, or in our community that deserve being met with cheers and confetti?

Now, this was a year filled with events that don't seem to fit into the category of praiseworthy.

I know.

This is the year you buried your pastor. This is the year you have had to grieve what was of your community with Phil and Becky at the helm.

This is the year where you had some disagreements, some painful conversations, or realizations that your differences of opinions and beliefs can cause broken relationships.

This wasn't the easiest year for Stanton Reformed.

I know.

And yet, this is the psalm we have before us - this last Sunday of the year.

And the last psalms of the book of psalms are praise psalms.

The massive book of 150 psalms ends with praise.

For sure in the middle of the book of psalms, there are psalms of thanksgiving, psalms that cry out to God in distress.

There are psalms that lament, truly devastating songs that do not show any light at all, songs that speak the truth when the world has gone dark around us.

There are psalms that petition God for help, for salvation, for provision, for companionship.

And in the end, the psalmists, or the editors of the psalms decide to wrap the whole thing up in praise.

Sometimes I think when we have a year like this one, forcing ourselves to find reason to praise seems like a - well, a forced activity.

What's the value in ending with praise?

Listen to this:

During the bombing raids of WWII, thousands of children were orphaned and left to starve.

Some were rescued and placed in refugee camps where they received food and good care.

But many of these children could not sleep at night, fearing waking up to find themselves again homeless and without food.

Someone had an idea, give the children each a piece of bread to hold at bedtime.

Holding the bread, the children could sleep in peace. The bread reminded them that they ate today and they will eat again tomorrow.

Praise is a universal sleep aid.

Praise is a universal activity - the mountains, the storms, the creeping animals and the humans.

We all live in a world that provokes thanks, lament, petition and praise.

Let us be people who end with praise.

