

Palm/Passion Sunday

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Matt 21:1-11; Phil 2:5-11

Responsive Reading: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

The Duke of Wellington, the British military leader who defeated Napoleon at Waterloo, was not an easy man to serve under. He was brilliant, demanding, and not one to shower his subordinates with compliments. Yet even Wellington realized that his methods left something to be desired. In his old age a young lady asked him what, if anything, he would do differently if he had his life to live over again. Wellington thought for a moment, then replied. "I'd give more praise," he said.

John Wesley was about 21 years of age when he went to Oxford University. He came from a Christian home, and he was gifted with a keen mind and good looks. Yet in those days he was a bit snobbish and sarcastic. One night, however, something happened that set in motion a change in Wesley's heart. While speaking with a porter, he discovered that the poor fellow had only one coat and lived in such impoverished conditions that he didn't even have a bed. Yet he was an unusually happy person, filled with gratitude to God.

Wesley, being immature, thoughtlessly joked about the man's misfortunes. "And what else do you thank God for?" he said with a touch of sarcasm. The porter smiled, and in the spirit of meekness replied with joy, "I thank Him that He has given me my life and being, a heart to love Him, and above all a constant desire to serve Him!" Deeply moved, Wesley recognized this man knew the meaning of true thankfulness

Many years later, in 1791, John Wesley lay on his deathbed at the age of 88. Those who gathered around him realized how well he had learned the lesson of praising God in every circumstance. Despite Wesley's extreme weakness, he began singing the hymn, "I'll Praise My Maker While I've Breath."

Louis Albert Banks tells of an elderly Christian man, a fine singer, who learned that he had cancer of the tongue and that surgery was required. In the hospital after everything was ready for the operation, the man said to the doctor, "Are you sure I will never sing again?"

The surgeon found it difficult to answer his question. He simply shook his head no. The patient then asked if he could sit up for a moment. "I've had many good times singing the praises of God," he said. "And now you tell me I can never sing again. I have one song that will be my last. It will be of gratitude and praise to God."

There in the doctor's presence the man sang softly the words of Isaac Watts' hymn, "I'll praise my Maker while I've breath,/ And when my voice is lost in death,/ Praise shall employ my nobler power;/ My days of praise shall ne'er be past,/ While life, and thought, and being last,/ Or immortality endures." MWB #166

Palm Sunday is a Sunday where we often are confused by the fickleness of the crowd. We praise Jesus with the crowds for his miracles and goodness, but it so quickly turns this week to events that led to his death. And let's not forget that we can be as capricious as they were. Like them we want the Messiah – to save us in the way we demand. I'm sure all of us are asking, "God what are you trying to say to the world with the Coronavirus?"

And we have the symbolism of Jesus riding into Jerusalem like a conqueror, but on a donkey, not a horse which is used for war. Our Philippians text is a great reminder that the character of Jesus is not that of a conquering warrior and king but that of a patient servant.

So let's not dismiss the loud cry's of hosanna and alleluia. Longing to understand Jesus more deeply, we say, "Show us how to both celebrate your life and honor your death." Today let's focus on why we cultivate actions and attitudes of praise. How does praise benefit you and I? Praise is warm approval, appreciation and admiration. It's the expression of support, endorsement and admiration for someone or something. But why should we take on these attitudes and habit? Why is the Bible full of commands to sing and offer praises to God?

The fact is, there have been more songs sung in praise of Jesus than any other person in history. And for all eternity, song writers will be busy coming up with new ones, for our praise of Him will never cease. Plus many passages of the Bible show us how to offer praise to our Redeemer and Creator. And we are told to build each other up with expressions of thanks and approval. So why is praise important?

Let's start off from the article by Debbie McDaniel, What the Power of Praise Can Do: 8 Reminders from His Word. There are lots of reasons to praise, more than we can list here, but that tells us how important it is for us to cultivate the habit of praise.

First, Praise turns our focus on to God & off ourselves. It's just too easy to selfishly focus on ourselves. But we are invited to focus our eyes on our Creator because that is where true life, real happiness, and constant hope is found.

Scripture tells us: "Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness!"
Psalms 150:2

And we are supposed to express: "And my tongue shall speak of your righteousness and of your praise all the day long."
Psalms 35:28

Second, Praise keeps us humble. The actions and attitudes help us put ourselves into our proper place in relation to the Savior. Praise helps us depend on and recognize the King of this world. It's a way to admit we are not in control and the Almighty is. Pride is possibly the deadliest of the deadly sins, that leads us into all kinds of relationship problems. So praising our Creator as well as each other, lifts others up, and places ourselves under others.

Scripture encourages us. "Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods."
Psalms 95:2-3

"I will give you thanks in the great congregation: I will praise you among much people."
Psalms 35:18

Praise leaves no room for complaining and negativity. In the Old Testament, one of the common deadly habits of the Israelites was grumbling and complaining that often led them to have rebellious spirits. So we need to keep track of ourselves. Even in our prayers, we can grouse about our problems.

We should follow the example of many Psalms that complain God isn't helping enough. But we also need to follow the example of the Psalms where there is lots of praise. Praises help us focus on God's love and blessings. They help us remember what our Creator has done in our lives. Our praises should have at least equal time with our grumbling but better yet, they should leave us no room or time to grumble. Most of all, praise helps us remember the Almighty is capable of taking care of us and our loved ones and the world. Way too often we need to get out of our own way, so the Holy Spirit can lead us and guide us. Praise allows this to occur.

God knows our problems and concerns. But we need to actively praise as Scripture encourages us. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy."

Psalms 103:2-4

"By Jesus therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name."

Hebrews 13:15

Praise makes the enemy flee. It's a powerful spiritual weapon. This cannot be overstated. It pushes back the darkness the surrounds us, and blocks the attacks and lies over us. Evil finds it difficult to stick around if we're praising our God, who will fight our battles for us. There are stories in the Bible like when Jehoshaphat and Israel's praised the Almighty, and miraculously defeated the enemy.

"As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated" 2 Chron. 20:22

Praise is one of the key weapons in spiritual warfare. Psalm 149:6 tells us: "May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands." Worship, praise and warfare against the devil are linked. We tend not to link these together, but they are weapons against evil and temptations. Psalm 8:2 offers us this: Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger." With praise we can fight our way out of battles with evil, and by praise we can push back the forces of death and destruction.

A Fifth reason to praise it it makes room for God's blessings over our lives. Our Creator will not hold back goodness as praise opens the gate-way of blessing as we come into the Presence of our King as well as live in the Lord's way.

"Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!"

Psalms. 100:4

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:" Ephesians 1:3

An important component of praise is, it invites the presence of our Savior. God dwells close to us when we praise Him. Our Creator lives there. And looks for it.

"Yahweh inhabits the praises of His people."

Psalms 22:3

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." 1 Pet. 2:9

Another reason to have the habit of praise is, our spirits are refreshed and renewed in the Eternal's presence. We are strengthened by God's peace and refueled by God's joy. With hearts of praise, we realize that God doesn't just change our situations and work through our problems – He changes our hearts.

Psalms says, "In His presence, there is fullness of joy." Psalms 16:11

"Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands." Psalms 63:3-4

Eighth, Praise paves the way for God's power to be displayed and often miracles happen. People's lives are affected & changed. God shakes things up through praise, some-times literally. As Paul and Silas sat in prison, shackled, and chained, they kept right on praising God. Then God sent an earthquake that shook the cells and broke the chains. The jailer and all his family came to know Christ that very night. And I suspect some of those in the jail did also. (Acts 16:25-26)

Another reason to offer praises, and specifically new ones is so that our worship does not grow stale. Quite a few verses tell us to: "**Sing unto Him a new song.**" (Ps 33:3) "He has put a new song in my mouth." (Ps 40:3) "I will sing a new song unto Thee O God." (Ps 144:9)

As much as we love our favorite hymns, and the memories that are attached to them, they lose their freshness and are hard to move us to true adoration. They become memorized rituals with no real praise because our minds are not on God. But a new song forces us to pay attention to what we are singing. It engages our minds and hearts. We can't day dream when singing a new song and therefore are more likely to be offering praise. New songs get us out of worship ruts and help us find constant renewal. They help us not get stuck in dead orthodoxy where we have truth but it makes no difference in our lives. New songs and praise generally helps keep us motivated to follow Jesus as well as keeping our love for Him fresh and alive.

By now you probably see that these reasons intertwine and even repeat themselves, with a new important twist. But I think it's good to unravel the mystery, power and wisdom that an attitude and actions of praise provide us. Examining praise from different angles helps us understand its importance for a deeper, more productive and faithful spiritual life.

A tenth reason to praise is, it gives us strength. Praising God is the most practical activity. It gives up energy. It lifts us up. It turns our fears and depression and sadness toward joy. It helps us gain perspective.

Nehemiah 8:10 says, "The joy of the Lord is your strength." Praise brings on joy. Joy leads to praise. Which comes first? Both do! What ever our situation, praise will be helpful to our mental, emotional, relational and spiritual health.

Another reason to praise is, **praise keeps us power oriented in Jesus**, while lack of praise leads us to be problem oriented. Ever met someone who often is negative and has little hope? After a while you find yourself not wanting to hang around them too much. The cure is to simply start praising the people around them, the government for what it's doing right, and especially our Lord and Savior.

Twelfth, **praise pleases God.** Psalm 149:4-5 informs us: "For the Eternal is listening, and nothing pleases Him more than His people; He raises up the poor and endows them with His salvation. Let

His faithful followers erupt in praise, - singing triumphantly wherever they are, even as they lie down for sleep in the evening.” Any relationship needs communication. Praise is a key way to relate to the Savior.

In looking at the Palm Sunday texts, it just seemed that at this time we need the reminder to praise. I hope that you are finding ways to praise those you are confined with, those who call to check on you, and especially our Lord and Savior. These reasons for praise will get us through this time. Even though we don't know what will happen, we still can praise.

I like this sentence. “A body is not crippled until its heart has ceased to praise.” Think about that. “A body is not crippled until its heart has ceased to praise.” Praise is inner health – emotional, mental, spiritual and possibly even physical – made audible.

One last point. **Praise softens the soil of our hearts so the seeds of the message can be planted.** Praise changes us for the better. And in itself is a witness. And as this time we face continues, our own witness becomes more and more important. May we continually honor the Savior who comes to us like is described in Philippians! And may we keep offering praise as a form of prayer to God.

Ritual of Response

Simply take the time to praise. Make it specific. Make it verbal. Even use your body in some way, like lifting up your hands as a way to help you make your praises new. Plus, you can sing along with hymns and praise songs for a while. Pick a song or two and sing them out loud each day.

Scriptures: The Voice translation

Isaiah 50:4-9a;

The Lord, the Eternal, equipped me *for this job*—

with *skilled speech, a smooth* tongue for instruction.

I can find the words that comfort and soothe the *downtrodden, tired, and despairing.*

And I know when to use them.

Each morning, it is God who wakes me and tells me what I should do,

what I should say.

⁵The Lord, the Eternal, has helped me to listen,

and *I do as He says.* I have not been rebellious or run away *from God's work.*

⁶*But it's been hard.* I offered My back to those who whipped me,

my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard;

I did not turn away from humiliation and spitting.

The prophet speaks, but his words are those of the Servant of God. The Servant is in tune with God, the Master Teacher. He teaches as he has been taught, and—for the first time it seems—He understands that suffering is an integral part of the work God has for him. The reality for God's Servant and any who follow him is this: to be close with God means to be at odds with people.

⁷Because the Lord, the Eternal, helps me I will not be disgraced;
so, I set my face like a rock, confident that I will not be ashamed.

⁸My hero who sets things right is near.

Who would dare to challenge me?

Let's stand *and debate this* head-to-head!

Who would dare to accuse me? Let him come near.

⁹See here, the Lord, the Eternal, helps me—who could possibly win against me?

Matthew 21:1-11;

After a great parade, Jesus and His disciples walk into the temple area, and what He sees enrages Him. He sees moneychangers, buying and selling. He sees men sitting on benches, hawking doves to those who have come from the countryside to make a sacrifice. He sees that the salesmen and teachers have turned a sanctuary of worship into a place of spiritual prostitution. This is the place where Jesus came as a boy to sit with the great teachers. It is the place where His Father receives the offerings of His people. It is more than Jesus can take.

Can anyone be surprised at this other side to Jesus? He has turned out to be not just a kindly teacher; instead, He is the Anointed One, not to be taken lightly. In the midst of this scene filled with joy and chaos, there are extremes. Some are beginning to understand who this man from Galilee is—the Anointed—but the rulers are having great difficulty with the disruption to their orderly world.

21 Jesus, the disciples, and the great crowds were heading toward Jerusalem when they came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus stopped and beckoned to two of the disciples.

Jesus: ²Go to the village over there. There you'll find a donkey tied *to a post* and a foal beside it.

Untie them and bring them to Me. ³If anyone tries to stop you, then tell him, "The Master needs these," and he will send the donkey and foal immediately.

⁴*He sent the disciples on ahead so His entry into Jerusalem could fulfill what the prophet Zechariah had long since foretold:*

⁵Tell this to Zion's daughter,

"Look—your King is approaching,

seated humbly on a donkey,

a young foal, a beast of burden."¹⁰

⁶ So the disciples went off and followed Jesus' instructions. ⁷ They brought the donkey and foal *to Jesus*, they spread their cloaks on the animals, and Jesus sat down on them. ⁸ The great crowd followed suit, laying their cloaks on the road. Others cut leafy branches from the trees and scattered those *before Jesus*. ⁹ And the crowds went before Jesus, *walked alongside Him*, and processed behind—all singing.

Crowd: Hosanna, praises to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Eternal One! Hosanna in the highest!^[a]

The way Jesus enters the city on a lowly donkey, with crowds surrounding Him singing praises, surprises many within Jerusalem.

¹⁰ *And that is how* Jesus came into Jerusalem. The people noticed this strange parade. They wondered who this could be, *this humble bearded man on a donkey who incited such songs*.

Crowd: ¹¹ This is Jesus, the prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee.

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵ *In other words*, adopt the mind-set of Jesus the Anointed. *Live with His attitude in your hearts.*
Remember:

⁶ Though He was in the form of God,
He chose not to cling to equality with God;
⁷ But He poured Himself out *to fill a vessel brand new*;
a servant in form
and a man indeed.

The very likeness of humanity,

⁸ He humbled Himself,
obedient to death—
a merciless death on the cross!

⁹ So God raised Him up to the highest place
and gave Him the name above all.

¹⁰ So when His name is called,
every knee will bow,^[a]
in heaven, on earth, and below.

¹¹ And every tongue will confess^[b]
“Jesus, the Anointed One, is Lord,”
to the glory of God our Father!

Paul describes a community where every person considers the needs of others first and does nothing from selfishness; it pulls together rather than pulls apart, and it is a body that knows its purpose and

lets nothing interfere with it. It is an extended spiritual family where others line up to become part of this sacred assembly and to make it their home because they feel encouragement and know they are truly loved. So Paul urges the Philippians to strive for this radical unity and fulfill his joy by having the mind of Jesus who humbled Himself, became a servant, and suffered the death of the cross. Jesus becomes the example of humility and service, leading to the kind of unity Paul imagines.

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29;

¹ Give thanks to the Eternal because He is *always* good.

He never ceases to be loving and kind.

² Let *the people of Israel* proclaim:

“He never ceases to be loving and kind.”

Early Christians found in the words of this psalm a wonderful way of describing the significance of Jesus. He was the rejected stone whom God made the cornerstone of a brand-new temple ([verses 22–24](#)).

¹⁹ Open *wide* to me the gates of justice
so that I may walk through them
and offer praise *and worship* to the Eternal.

²⁰ This is the gate of the Eternal;
the righteous *children of God* will go through it.

²¹ I will praise You because You answered me *when I was in trouble*.
You have become my salvation.

²² The stone that the builders rejected
has become the very stone that holds together the entire foundation.

²³ This is the work of the Eternal,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.^[a]

²⁴ This is the day the Eternal God has made;
let us celebrate and be happy today.

²⁵ O Eternal One, save us, we beg You.
O Eternal One, we beg You, bring us success!

²⁶ He who comes in the name of the Eternal will be blessed;^[b]
we have blessed You from the house of the Eternal.

²⁷ The Eternal is the True God;
He shines His light on us.

Let the feast begin.

Bring the sacrifice, and tie it to the horns of the altar.

²⁸ You are my God, and I give You thanks;

You are my God, and I praise You.

²⁹ Give thanks to our Eternal Lord; He is always good.

He never ceases to be loving and kind.

³ Let *the priests of Aaron's* line proclaim:

“He never ceases to be loving and kind.”

⁴ Let the people who fear the Eternal proclaim:

“He never ceases to be loving and kind.”

⁵ When trouble surrounded me, I cried out to the Eternal;

He answered me and brought me to a wide, open space.

⁶ The Eternal is with me,

so I will not be afraid of anything.

If God is on my side, how can anyone hurt me?

⁷ The Eternal is on my side, a champion for my cause;

so when I look at those who hate me, victory will be in sight.

⁸ It is better to put your faith in the Eternal *for your security*

than to trust in people.

⁹ It is better to put your faith in Him *for your security*

than to trust in princes.

¹⁰ All *these* nations surround me, *squeezing me from all sides*;

with the name of the Eternal, I will destroy them.

¹¹ They *rose up against me*, squeezed me from all sides, yes, from all sides;

with the name of the Eternal, I will destroy them.

¹² They surrounded me like *a swarm of bees*;

they were destroyed *quickly and thoroughly*—

Flaring up like a pile of thorns—

with the name of the Eternal, I will destroy them.

¹³ I was pushed *back*, attacked so that I was about to fall,

but the Eternal was there to help me *keep my balance*.

¹⁴ He is my strength, and He is the reason I sing;

He has been there to save me *in every situation*.

¹⁵ In the tents of the righteous *soldiers of God*,

there are shouts of joy and victory. *They sing*:

“The right hand of the Eternal has shown His power.

¹⁶ The mighty arm of the Eternal is raised *in victory*;

the right hand of His has shown His power.”

¹⁷I will not die. I will live.

I will live to tell about all the Eternal has done.

¹⁸The Eternal *has taught me many lessons*;

He has been strict and severe,

but even in His discipline, He has not allowed me to die.