

EASTER 5 - April 24, 2016
The Rev. Carenda Baker
Texts: Psalm 148 / Revelation 21:1-6

You may have lost count by now, so here is a reminder that we are now on Day #28 of the 50 Fabulous Days of Easter in which our spiritual work focuses on ***practicing resurrection***. That is, we focus on leaning into life and growing as Easter people. On the 4 previous Sundays in Easter we have heard that: Love wins and the risen Christ calls each of us by name. That doubts and disbelief are not denounced but addressed and affirmed by the presence of the living Lord. That joy, humor, and vitality are sure signs that the Jesus movement is alive and well among us, and that there is forgiveness and a second chance after failure. That Resurrection comes by receiving new vision and learning to really look, and see things differently.

Today we are invited to consider that practicing resurrection means learning to know and experience the *POWER OF and NEED FOR GIVING PRAISE*.

In those fourteen brief, compact verses of Psalm 148, did you notice how many times we said, "praise"? "Praise him!" "Praise the Lord!" "Praise the name of the Lord!" Ten times in fourteen verses. The image that came to mind for me after reading the psalm several times is that silly arcade game, Whack-a-Mole. You know the one where the moles pop up randomly and the player tries to whack them back into their holes using a foam bat.

Not that we are trying to whack moles or anything else back into holes today, but there is a sense in this psalm that praise repeatedly and randomly keeps popping up. It's a reminder of the abundant and random nature of reasons we have to praise the Lord that come in any given day.

I wake up. Praise the Lord! I have food to eat. Praise him! I have meaningful work to do and reliable transportation to get to work! Praise the name of the Lord! I engage with people who know my name and care for me. Praise the Lord! I breathe in the crisp, clean spring air and see the swath of bright colors of so many flowering and green things coming into bloom. Praise the name of the Lord! All these reasons to praise the Lord, and I have not even been awake for more than a few hours!

Well, there are also those moments and days when I inadvertently whack these abundant and seemingly random invitations to praise out of my view, for whatever reason. I get caught up in my to-do list. I'm preoccupied with concern for someone. There's pressure to meet a deadline.

This psalm is not just an invitation to praise. It actually is phrased as an imperative – “Praise the Lord”. “You will do this”, in other words. It’s not describing that all of life is clear and smooth sailing. But the psalm itself offers a “new thing” because it is forward leaning and hopeful. Praise is going to happen, because God is worthy of it, and all of creation was made to praise God.

Did you notice in this psalm that the focus is not on human beings doing all the praising? People aren’t mentioned until verse 11, two-thirds of the way through the psalm. Before people are ever mentioned, it’s the heavens, the angels and heavenly host, the sun, moon, stars and waters that are commanded to praise the Lord. Then come all the sea creatures, and fire, hail, snow, fog, and wind, mountains and hills, fruit trees and evergreens, and then we get to the four legged and winged creatures.

I got to wondering, ‘How is that inanimate things, like rocks and wind, or even living and breathing creatures that are not human can actually praise God?’ They can’t sing or speak or pray, so how in the world can they offer praise?

In truth, every part of creation praises God by being fully what it was created to be, in all its uniqueness as God designed it.

Many of us have pets, so let’s take for example my Siamese cat Sam. I believe Sam is actually praising God when he engages in a long and luxurious stretch after a nap. When he curls up on the back of the sofa in that cozy and sunny, warm spot in front of the window. When he opens the kitchen and bathroom cabinet doors and goes inside to see if there is anything new to be investigated. When he catches baby birds, moles, or mice, plays with them, and then wants to bring his prize into the house! When he scootches up on his hind legs in anticipation, readying himself to pounce at Phoebe, my other cat, when she comes around the corner. When he purrs in contentment. When he climbs into my lap as I am trying to pray or meditate or watch a movie. And as he bolts from my sight and my grasp outdoors when he is frightened by a big dog, climbs a tree and won’t come down, meowing piteously, his paws wrapped tightly around the tree branch where he is stuck. Sam is being Sam, and he is praising God by fully being Sam, the lively and quirky Siamese cat God created!

How well do we see and hear the praises of creation all around us? When we see a beautiful sight or hear a lovely sound in nature, what happens? Hopefully, we slow down, look and listen more carefully, admire, and quite often, give thanks for the beauty and wonder we have just experienced. Nature, splendid or sublime, delicate or devastating, calls for our praise of its existence, and its praiseworthiness as part of the world God commanded into being.

But this command to praise in Psalm 148 also challenges us. It calls us to think about our responsibility to protect ALL creation’s capacity to praise its Creator. As human beings, when we do the Resurrection work of praising God, we acknowledge that we are not the center of the universe, but we are part of a completely connected web of relationships with all that God has made and redeemed. All of creation is in the

business of praising God, and because of that, the whole creation is ours to love and to serve as partner and friend. This means that we have to consider our role as stewards who are called to be good caretakers of the earth God loves and Jesus died and rose to make whole. Praise is not just an idea. It is an action.

Giving voice to our praise through worship and prayer is important for our spiritual life. But to go deeper and embody praise in what we do, it will require us to face and think about the ways in which the created world has become so fragile and sick. And some of that sickness is due to the unintended consequences of our prosperity. Embodying praise will mean finding the intersection between what the world needs and what we can do – like reduce our consumption, reuse, re-purpose and recycle. Check our carbon footprint. I learned this week that the Chambersburg borough will now be collecting items for recycling. It will mean thinking about arid lands where crops are difficult to grow, where clean water is scarce for both drinking and growing food to eat. It will mean paying attention to the needs of endangered species. It may mean we join the Sierra Club or learn about the Episcopal Ecological Network. It could mean contributing to the work of Episcopal Relief and Development. To enter fully into praise as a resurrection practice means that we love life enough to struggle against all that diminishes it. To love this world is a holy act.

Psalm 148 is not a song calling us to return to the good old days of life in the Garden of Eden. Psalm 148 is a new song, sung at the coming of a new creation, with a new harmony. It is a song written to command praise because there IS a new heaven and a new earth, as John describes it in his vision in Revelation. And the major work of the new heaven and new earth is **PRAISE**.

Such newness we could not have imagined a few weeks ago when we wept at the foot of the cross. But we have walked through the disorientation of Good Friday, and are not looking back. We are looking and moving forward where everything is made new and we are armed with fresh hope. This is the work of the risen Christ, and by virtue of our baptism, we who are now dead to sin and raised with him, this is our work to continue as Easter people. Let us take on the mantle of praise in voice and action, friends. For when we do so, it is like we are reaching out to kiss the loving hand of God. May our praise in words and deeds, be something truly beautiful for God.