

Aldersgate United Methodist Church

4/18/2021

Speaker: Debbie Todd

“Praise the Lord”

Good Morning,

You know, I'm always humbled, excited, and scared when I get the opportunity to fill in for a pastor. Excited, because I can't wait to see what God is going to teach me to share with you. And scared because I don't want to be a flop. Well, when Pastor Matthias asked me to preach today, I asked for the lectionary readings. I sat at my kitchen table and read them and waited. Nothing. So, I read them again, waited and, nothing. They just seemed to go KLUNK! I couldn't seem to connect with any of them and more importantly, I didn't hear God say anything to me.

Now, God speaks to all of us through the scriptures, but He speaks to us in other ways, if we're paying attention and listening. I know Burt often hears God when he's in his wood shop. For me? God has always spoken to me through music. So, when I didn't hear anything from Him, I said, “ok, God, what DO you want me to talk about and instantly, 3 songs came to my mind. They were all 3 in my mind simultaneously and yet, I could hear all 3 very distinctly. They were ALL about praising God. So, praising God it is.

As I told the kids, when I was a little girl, my parents and a couple of other families started a new church on the West (poor) side of Joplin. Our first pastor was a retired minister named Brother Floyd Cole. In the denomination that I grew up in, we called the pastor a minister and called him Preacher of Brother. When my family moved to Oklahoma when I was 11, people called my dad Preacher Ford. Now, when Brother Cole would get up on the pew and would clap his hand and tap his foot in time to the music, which was always lively, I loved it. It really made an impression on me. While I could probably not have articulated it at age 9, the impact of Brother Cole worshipping God that way made me want to know more about this God that made him so happy. I remember that I started really paying attention to those Sunday School lessons which were basically stories about the people in the Bible.

Probably most, if not all of you know that I'm from the South and there are churches where the people get, shall we say, excited, during worship. I was raised Fundamentalist, Evangelical. That means that the word of God is inerrant and while no one says it, the implication is that it was dictated in the King James

version. But I wasn't raised charismatic. That means that people in worship do things like raising their hands towards heaven, dancing in the aisles, and shouting Hallelujah! I've seen people do this. Halleluiah and Praise the Lord seem to be the most favorite things to shout. In fact, I know people who let "Praise the Lord" slide off their lips like slobber off the chin of a teething child.

Please understand, I don't mean to be critical of these folks. Demonstrative worship is just not something I do in public. It takes me way out of my comfort zone. When I do raise my hands to heaven, it's a very private moment for me, one that is just between God and me. By the way, did you know that the word Hallelujah means "praise the Lord in Hebrew?" And the phrase "Praise the Lord" is in the Bible 214 times? Don't worry, we're not going to cover all of those today.

This begs the question, "why do we praise God and when are we supposed to do it?" First, we praise God because He made us and knows absolutely everything about us. Psalm 139:14 says, "I will praise Thee for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Thy works and THAT my soul knoweth right well." God created us out of love. Knowing everything about us....the good and the bad....our thoughts, our deeds.....yet, He loves us anyway. We are constantly on His mind even though He doesn't occupy our thoughts all the time.

Not all of the Psalms are written by David. Some are written by an un-named Psalter. Psalm 146:1-2 says "Praise ye the Lord, Praise the Lord oh my soul. While I live, will I praise the Lord. I will sing praises to my God while I have any being." So, it wasn't just David that acknowledged the need to praise God. I love these verses. They show me what praising God looks like. As long as I have life and breath, I should be praising God.

How do we go about praising God all day? Well, you know that internal dialogue that runs through our minds at various times during the day and night? What makes up those dialogues? Plans, like "what do I plan to do today" do I plan to attend that meeting today, or what do I plan to fix for dinner?

And there are conversations that run and rerun through our minds. Well, at least they do mine. Boy can these become toxic for us. We can dwell on things someone said or did that hurt our feelings or made us mad. We think about what we should have said or what we would have said. We relive slights, times when we've felt overlooked, ignored, or unappreciated.

Too many times our thoughts are focused on things that are not productive worthy, kind or loving. Galatians 5:2 lists the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance..." If these are our thoughts, then praising God should be the result of these. It should be easy to praise God day and night. Not literally every minute of the day, but at times when it is appropriate.

If we start thinking about our painful past, instead of wallowing in our self-pity, that hatred towards someone, our lack of forgiveness for some wrong done to us, we should praise God then because He has delivered us from that hurtful past. It's gone. It's over. Let it go! We can't say we love God and hate someone. I John 4:20 is very specific about that, "If a man say I love God and hateth his brother, he is a liar, for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" So, when you start to recall wrongs done to you in the past, STOP and praise God instead. BUT, DON'T think you can fool God. If you are not truly praising from the heart, but are simply going through the motions, He is going to know. And for heaven's sake, don't try to get even with someone. In II Chronicles 20:21-22 the Israelites trusted God and He gave them victory. "And when he (King Jehoshaphat) had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the Lord, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and to Praise the Lord, for His mercy endureth forever. And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah and they were smitten." Smitten not with love but the enemies of the Israelites were defeated. If you try to get revenge, you'll get smitten. God will correct you! And we know how hard on us that can be!

So, when do we praise? Psalm 34:1 "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth." Psalm 61:8 "So I will sing praises unto Thy name forever."

In case you think that David was the only one who praised and talked of praising God, Acts 16:25 "And at midnight, Paul and Silas (who were in prison) prayed and sang praises unto God..." Also, I Peter 2:9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." WE are members of that royal priesthood! We should be praising God.

Bob Wilkin in his "Grace in Focus" articles says "Praising God is a conscious activity. We praise God for his goodness, His greatness, His majesty, His love, His

mercy, His mighty deeds. Simply saying ‘Praise the Lord’ is not praising. Praise is a constant admiration and thanks to God for whom God is and what He has done.”

So, brothers and sisters, praise the Lord!