

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

COME, JOIN THE CONVERSATION!
ON
THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Lesson Plan for Thursday – November 21, 2013

Conversation #9 – “*Psalms of Community Praise*”

Our objectives for this session:

- to share personal ideas, attitudes, and experiences relating to The Psalms; and, in doing so, strengthen our SAKLC fellowship;
- to describe some key characteristics of Psalms of Community (*corporate*) Praise;
- to experience the joy of praising God, guided by the psalms of community praise;
- to examine the use of Psalms of Community Praise in our worship @ SAKLC;
- to consider the implications of including Psalms of Community Praise in our corporate worship; then try to put their message into practice in contemporary life situations.

A UNISON OPENING PRAYER –

Loving God, we yearn to have the totality of our lives be a reflection of praise to you. Yet our lives are sometimes scattered; our attention is often focused on other responsibilities and cares.

When we have forgotten to lift our praises to you, forgive us!

When we become burdened with other concerns and turn our eyes from you, help us!

When we are weak in faith and question your presence in our lives, strengthen us!

May our lives truly be a song of praise and thanksgiving for all you have done for us as individuals and as your gathered people, the church.

Hear us O God, for we are grateful! AMEN.

A) Psalms of Community Praise (an overview)

- *Praise God in general terms for God’s greatness and faithfulness as creator of the universe and ruler of history.*

- *Songs which extol the glory and greatness of YHWH as those attributes are revealed in nature, world history, and particularly in Israel's history.*
- *Simplest form of a Psalm of Community Praise - #117. {Martin Luther once remarked that it was purposefully short and simple so that anyone could easily grasp its meaning!}*

¹ Praise the LORD, all you nations!
Extol him, all you peoples!
² For great is his steadfast love toward us,
and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.
Praise the LORD!

B) CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNITY PSALMS OF PRAISE

1) An Introduction or Call to Worship –

a) usually an imperative, stated in 2nd person plural

b) it can also be a “bidding” formula such as in Psalm 95 -

¹ O come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
² Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

c) or, it can be addressed as a summons to the psalmist's *self*, such as “Bless [*Praise*] YHWH,” such as in Psalm 104

¹ Bless the LORD, O my soul {my being}.
O LORD my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honor and majesty

d) this imperative note, struck in the introduction may later be repeated in the body of the Psalm, as seen once again using Psalm 95 as illustration:

¹ O come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
² Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
³ For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
⁵ The sea is his, for he made it,
and the dry land, which his hands have formed.

**6 O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
7 For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.**

- e) imperative notes can be expanded even further by use in multiple verses; see these excerpts from **Psalm 148**.

**1 Praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!
2 Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his host!

3 Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars!
4 Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!

7 Praise the LORD from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps,

13 Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.**

2) Main Section: The Motive for Praise

- a) In many cases the transition to the motive for praise is introduced by the word **“for”**
- look above at **Psalm 95:3, 7** – look below at **Psalm 33** –

**4 For the word of the LORD is upright,
and all his work is done in faithfulness.**

- b) The motive for praise is sometimes varied by using clauses that effectively ask the question: **“who?”** An example is provided in Psalm 104 ... ask the question: **“Who is Lord?”** ... and, the creative descriptions are provided thusly:

**1 Bless the LORD, O my soul.
O LORD my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honor and majesty,
2 wrapped in light as with a garment.**

**You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
3 you set the beams of your chambers on the waters,
you make the clouds your chariot,
you ride on the wings of the wind,
4 you make the winds your messengers,
fire and flame your ministers.**

**5 You set the earth on its foundations,
so that it shall never be shaken.
6 You cover it with the deep as with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.
7 At your rebuke they flee;
at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.
8 They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys
to the place that you appointed for them.
9 You set a boundary that they may not pass,
so that they might not again cover the earth.**

**10 You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills,
11 giving drink to every wild animal;
the wild asses quench their thirst.
12 By the streams the birds of the air have their
habitation;
they sing among the branches.
13 From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.**

**14 You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,
15 and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
and bread to strengthen the human heart.
16 The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
17 In them the birds build their nests;
the stork has its home in the fir trees.
18 The high mountains are for the wild goats;
the rocks are a refuge for the coney.
19 You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.
20 You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
21 The young lions roar for their prey,**

c) or, the motive for praise is found in long passages that portray God's majesty as displayed in the history of creation as in these verses of Psalm 33:

**⁴ For the word of the LORD is upright,
and all his work is done in faithfulness.**

**⁵ He loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.**

**⁶ By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
and all their host by the breath of his mouth.**

**⁷ He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle;
he put the deeps in storehouses.**

**⁸ Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.**

**⁹ For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.**

**¹⁰ The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;
he frustrates the plans of the peoples.**

**¹¹ The counsel of the LORD stands forever,
the thoughts of his heart to all generations.**

**¹² Happy is the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage.**

**¹³ The LORD looks down from heaven;
he sees all humankind.**

**¹⁴ From where he sits enthroned he watches
all the inhabitants of the earth—**

**¹⁵ he who fashions the hearts of them all,
and observes all their deeds.**

**¹⁶ A king is not saved by his great army;
a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.**

**¹⁷ The war horse is a vain hope for victory,
and by its great might it cannot save.**

**¹⁸ Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him,
on those who hope in his steadfast love,**

**¹⁹ to deliver their soul from death,
and to keep them alive in famine.**

3) **A Recapitulation**: often these psalms conclude with a renewed summons to praise, echoing the note first struck @ the beginning.

- The most important element of a Community Psalm of Praise is the main section which gives the ground or motive for praise.
- Hymns of this form were undoubtedly used on a variety of worship occasions in the Temple, much as general hymns of praise are used in our regular services of worship!
- Other hymns seem to have been used for special festal occasions, corresponding to the special music used in Christian churches today at Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, etc.

C) An outline of Hymns of Community Praise - grouped by 3 general themes:

1) Hymns to God who created (*Redeemed*) Israel –

Psalm 66:1-12 “Come and see what God has done!”
Psalm 100 “The Lord, who made us, is God”
Psalm 111 “God sent redemption to his people.”
Psalm 114 “When Israel went forth from Egypt”
Psalm 149 “Let Israel be glad in his Maker”

2) Hymns to God who created the world

Psalm 8 “When I look at thy heavens”
Psalm 19:1-6 “The heavens are telling the glory of God”
Psalm 95:1-7a “In his hand are the depths of the earth..”
Psalm 104 “In wisdom hast thou made them all.”
Psalm 148 “He commanded and they were created.”

3) Hymns to the Creator and Ruler of history

Psalm 33 “He spoke and it came to be.”
Psalm 103 “Your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”
Psalm 113 “He raises the poor from the dust.”
Psalm 117 “Extol him, all you peoples!”
Psalm 145 “The eyes of all look to thee.”
Psalm 146 “I will sing praises to my God while I have being.”
Psalm 147 “He sends forth his command to the earth.”

D) THE SPECIAL QUALITY OF PSALM 150

- Is not included in the above enumeration because it is a **doxology** that “rounds out” the entire Psalter;
- nevertheless, it is particularly interesting because it calls upon an entire orchestra of instruments, including trumpet, lute, harp, timbrel, strings, pipe and cymbals to join in praising God;
- this psalm is an indication that Israel’s praise was not a quiet meditation but rather the making of a “joyful noise” to the Lord;
- this psalm is reminiscent of the earliest days of Hebrew history when Miriam and her companions praised YHWH to the accompaniment of timbrels and dancing; (*Ex 15:20-21*)
- worship is the response of the whole being to God’s overture, which sometimes may take on the form of bodily movement;
- this is not to suggest the frenzied excitement of some groups who regularly used music, drugs and dancing to stimulate religious ecstasy; it is perhaps more like the Greek drama forms in which a chorus, through singing and dancing, expressed the people’s involvement in the drama.

E) PRACTICUM – ANALYSIS OF A SPECIAL PSALM OF COMMUNITY PRAISE #113

- throughout history this psalm has been used within the Jewish tradition at all major festivals and is recited corporately at both the beginning and end of Passover;
- it is a song of hope and new life, indicating that when God acts, lives are transformed;
- for Christians, it is often associated with the celebration of Easter;
- in the Hebrew text, the opening and closing words of the psalm are the same: “HALLEL”
- “HALLEL” is simply translated “PRAISE!”
- at other times it is translated as “Praise the Lord!” or “Hallelujah.”

Instruction: first read the psalm; then, pencil in some brackets to identify:

- 1) The opening introduction or Call to Worship
- 2) The main body identifying the motive for praise
- 3) The Recapitulation of invitation to praise

PSALM 113

Praise the LORD!

**You servants of the LORD,
praise his name!**

**² May his name be praised,
now and forever.**

**³ From the east to the west
praise the name of the LORD!**

**⁴ The LORD rules over all nations;
his glory is above the heavens.**

**⁵ There is no one like the LORD our God.
He lives in the heights above,**

**⁶ but he bends down
to see the heavens and the earth.**

**⁷ He raises the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from their misery**

**⁸ and makes them companions of princes,
the princes of his people.**

**⁹ He honors the childless wife in her home;
he makes her happy by giving her children.**

Praise the LORD!

Further Instruction/discussion: now with a partner(s) discuss Psalm 133 and seek to answer these questions:

1. As you reflect on the psalmist's words at this moment in your life, do you feel like you are sitting more with "*princes*" (vs. 8) or in a heap of "*dust*" (vs. 7) ???
2. Who is included in the praise of God in Psalm 113?
3. How does our praise to God on high serve to reverse the lot of the needy?

4. What 3 groups of *hope-deprived* people does this psalm address? In what ways do these groups display a lack of social power or position in life?
5. In what ways does Psalm 113 show that God's action can create miracles, that when God acts, the unbelievable can happen?
6. What is the significance of beginning and ending the psalm with the same word of praise? In other words, what is being held together within the 'bookends' of the word "HALLEL?"
7. This psalm moves from the boundary-less praise of God to a focus on God's wonderful acts on behalf of those in need. While we are called to praise God, God continues to be active in the world, promoting justice and righteousness for all creation. Can praise of God exist apart from human participation in it? If human beings don't praise God, who or what will?
8. Think about the images of those who are needy, poor and barren in today's society. Where in your life are you in need, poor in spirit or material well-being, or barren of new life? Do you think it is possible to praise God even in the midst of being in great need?
9. How might Psalm 113 be used today – in the life of a worshipping congregation like SAKLC - to challenge people, or to redirect their thoughts or energies?

CONCLUDING WORSHIP- *a separate worship order will be distributed at the conclusion of this session!*

REMINDER: Due to Thanksgiving, **CONVERSATIONS** will not meet on November 28th. Our next session will be held on December 5, 2013.

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