God is Worthy of Praise

Narrative Lectionary

Pentecost 1

June 16, 2019

Psalm 113

Luke 15: 8-10

Over the next few weeks, our readings focus on the Psalms. Today’s reading, Psalm 113 is one of the few Psalms that begins and ends in “Praise the Lord” or Hallelujah. It begins early on, praising the name of the Lord and Blessing God’s name. Names are important and were an important concept in the near East. Names reflected the character of the person who bore them and the very essence of their being. To speak their name was to speak someone or something into being. Yesterday at our Pride Communion service, Elder Lorna Standingready shared with us during her welcome to the land, that she has her name she was born with and the names she was given by the Christians. When a dominant culture has renamed someone, I think it is important to honour them with their original name. The Israelite’s derived the name for God Yahweh, from the response Moses received when he asked ‘whom shall I say sent me’, and God told him “tell them I AM that I AM” sent you. In that name, they possessed an important aspect of the being of God.

This Psalm emphasizes the importance of Praising God for so much in life. Praise is an important orientation in life and situates us in a positive way toward each other. How much better would our world be if we spent more time praising each other and life? Studies show that up to 85% of our interactions between parents and their children are critical or instructive. Less than 15% are simply affirming or uplifting. When you think of your relationship with God, is it more praiseworthy and gratitude filled or more focused on instructing, asking, complaining, lamenting? Not that the latter are necessarily bad, they are part of life, however, being intentional about praising God, thanking God and celebrating God’s goodness reframes us and keeps us oriented in a more positive way toward God and life. What ways can you be more intentional to praise others? Are there people you have been grateful for and maybe even told others about but not shared with them? As we are appreciate others’ involvement in things, and maybe even tell them, do we also take time to find out how they are, or learn more about what is going on for them? How can we honour who they are, the I AM in them?

Yesterday during the Pride parade, we couldn’t help but notice the gratitude and celebration of those lined up on a much longer parade route, as they recognized our signs and banners when we approached, with their cheering, waves, and wishes of “Happy Pride”. The parade and Pride itself is about people claiming who they are. There are people in the community who have renamed themselves as they claim their identity. Many come to a new understanding of themselves, their essence. It is wonderful to see allies doing the same as we passed and there were a number of signs held by families with their family name and quotes like “proud to be allies”. Jim Tenford, minister from St. Andrews, Moose Jaw commented how wonderful it was to see all the children with their families watching and learning that being who we are, as we are, is something to celebrate. Praising of others is the praise of God. The communion service offered by Affirming Ministries was well received, gathering a good crowd of people, and especially once we started, more gathered around. One of the feedback cards we received back afterwards spoke volumes with a note: *“Grateful for a Christian table that welcomes me as I am”*. In their praise, we experience God.

The Psalmists identifies that there is none like God, through the question, “Who is like the Lord our God?” based on the description that follows. No one else lifts up the poor and gives barren women a home, making her a mother of children. God here is counter-cultural. In a society that was harsh and judgemental, not much unlike our own, where the poor were blamed for their poverty; and in a world where women who could not have children were deemed of no use, because the only role of women was bringing children into the world; God does not accept these judgements. The God of the Psalmist turns the world upside down and gives all people a proper place in life, especially the poor and outcast. In God’s community, the poor are lifted up and placed with the wealthy, among princes; the barren women are given a home and will be able to be mothers to children. God names them, their essence, their identity is honoured and upheld. This is something to praise. This is the kind of community we are called and challenged to live out.

We continue to be challenged as a Canadian community as we seek to understand and work toward reconciliation with the Indigenous peoples of Canada, many of whom are the poor and lowly of our society. The Craft-study group finished this week the book, The Inconvenient Indian, which really opened our eyes to the realities and struggles of indigenous peoples of North America over the last 200 years or more. If you were not part of the study, it is a good book to read and I invite you to have some conversation with those who have read it to get their perspective, some may even loan you their copy of the book. If you were in the group I invite you to raise your hand so others can see who they might talk with. As we reflected on our experience of the book, many appreciated the authors’ humour which made some of the hard truths easier to hear and take in. One of the things that struck me was in reading about some of the recent protests, such as the Oka crisis, learning that they are the result of decades if not more than a hundred years of struggle with the government to get the lands or other things the Indigenous nations were promised. It means for me, that whenever I hear of a struggle or protest, to remember, realize, and research what is the larger story of history here, because the issue is probably about much more, and a much longer struggle than we are hearing about. So as we hear the concerns named in the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women’s report and wonder and hear different perspectives on whether it should be named as genocide or not, it may be important to explore the bigger picture and consider where that perspective may be coming from. As the TRC named the residential school legacy a cultural genocide, it is the same kinds of policies and practices, which create the social attitudes that lead to a disproportionate number of indigenous women and girls going missing or being killed and experiencing less investigation than usual. As we reflect on this loss, it is important to honour the names for those missing and murdered, for how many names are missed, how many are lost? In the midst of all of this history and struggle, we can hear stories that indicate the resilience, love and peacefulness of the indigenous as a people. Some Indigenous Christians, even though Christianity was imposed upon them, see their faith as a gift and are grateful for their relationship with Jesus. Many, more recently, are integrating their Christian faith with their indigenous spirituality and reclaiming who they are as a result, reclaiming their I AM, the Creator within them. Many live their lives within their traditions – both indigenous and Christian -offering praise and thanksgiving. It is the indigenous people of this land who God also lifts up in the Psalm today.

At the INI Café, reconciliation through performing arts on Friday, Erroll Kinistino, talked about his personal story and struggles as well as the struggles of his people, as he acknowledged and celebrated the importance of reconciliation. He was deeply grateful for Rachel MacDonald’s music who played before him. He said her music, gave him the strength to share the stories he did and he praised her for it, more than once. In his sharing, he made a comment that maybe his people were meant to be lowly, maybe God intended that for them from the Europeans but I have a hard time believing that, especially when I read scripture like the psalm today. In this passage, God’s kingship is revealed in a preferential option for the poor and outcast – God raises them, lifts them and gives them a home, a seat among nobles. That is definitely a challenging message but one worthy of praise. All are worthy of God and God’s love and no one is meant to be lowly or lower or less than anyone else. And that my friends is good news and something to be praised!

May we reflect on where and how we can help people claim their names and identity, recognizing everyone has value. May we see the importance of raising up the names of those who are nameless, missing or forgotten. May all of this move us to claim the I AM of God, the name of God in us and others, taking pride in who and whose we are. May we know that when we praise and lift up others, we are praising God. May we identify what in our lives is worthy of God’s praise, and may God’s name be praised in the praise we offer one another!