

## **I Praise, U Praise, We All Praise Together – Psalm 145:1-10, 21**

**July 5, 2009**

When I made the decision to do this People's Choice sermon series this summer, I knew that I was taking a bit of a risk in doing so. Of course I realized I still reserved some pastor privilege to pick and choose what to preach on and what not, but I also knew that I wanted to be sensitive and faithful to your requests and suggestions. And fortunately, most of them have been excellent and for the most part manageable - until this morning.

Who knew that the request to preach on the different ways we praise would bring me the most amount of angst and anxiety so far. I sure didn't when the request came in during the church picnic as a matter of fact. I thought – great - an easy topic that certainly won't stir up too much controversy and emotion. What was I thinking – especially for a combined service where I was hoping and praying we could just all get along?

We pastors actually have a name for what I was concerned about and this church has certainly not been immune to it – that being of course the dreaded worship wars. Unfortunately, I think you know what I am talking about. You have seen the frowning battlements in the faces seated in pews, have heard the rumble of its artillery in negative comments from both sides and felt the white heat of its lethal shrapnel in meetings.

- "It's boring!"
- "Why, those songs are so old, every time I sing them I get a backache!"
- "Worship is becoming a nightclub act! What will we do next?"

- "Choruses are 7-11 worship. Seven words repeated eleven times!"

Of course this is not a new war by any means. In an article addressing why new music should be opposed in the church, it says....

- It's not as melodious as the more established style.
- This new music creates disturbances and causes people to act in an indecent and disorderly manner.
- It places too much emphasis on instruments rather than godly lyrics.
- The lyrics are often worldly, even blasphemous.
- It is not needed, since preceding generations have gone to heaven without it.
- These new musicians are young upstarts and some of them are lewd and loose persons.

No – this was not directed at our wonderful praise team. Believe it or not, this comes from an article written in 1783 in opposition to the use of hymns in church services. And who could forget the classic 1992 movie – over seventeen years ago - that addressed this very struggle in the church in a rather unique and I believe entertaining way. Let's take a look and see what I am talking about. (Go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2osa8o8L-E> to see the clip).

Needless-to-say, the more research and preparation I did for this sermon, the more I worried I was going to only reopen or refuel the debate or war here at St. John's - which of course is the last thing I want to do. I think you are all well aware that I truly enjoy both of our worship services and think we have done a tremendous job in offering two very distinct, powerful and praiseworthy styles of

worship. Something many churches – including United Methodist Churches - have not been able to do which I find quite odd.

Granted, John Wesley and his brother Charles were true to their Anglican background and died as loyal priests in the Church of England - both with high views of the sacraments, an appreciation for tradition, a love of the liturgy, the beauty and the depth of meaning in the worship experience, and a sense of awe, wonder and dignity in worship. But their passion and desire to reach people with the message of Christ was equally as strong and pushed them to do whatever was necessary to accomplish this important goal including trying new forms and breaking out of old patterns. Nothing could stop their passion to spread the Word or their willingness to break with tradition and create new ways of worship.

A major reason why the early Methodist movement was so successful was because they were willing to go where the people were and sing songs the people could sing, as they carried the good news of personal salvation across the frontier and ultimately around the world. Revivals and camp meetings were all new – and at times controversial - attempts to reach people for Jesus Christ.

For those of you who have never heard of Methodist camp meetings, one historian called them the great prolonged outdoor extravaganzas, perhaps lasting several weeks at a time with powerful preaching, communal living, the call to conversion and great food. And we wonder why we Methodists like to eat so much.

So I guess it is no surprise that we continually find ourselves embroiled in battles over changes to the style of worship that we are used to. As one article I

read on the subject suggested, in ten or twenty years young people will be saying the contemporary songs we sing today are outdated and they will want something new and different to help them worship and praise our God.

Whether we like it or not, real life is unpredictable and full of interruptions and changes and the church is not immune to real life. We organize our worship, print an "Order of Worship," and hope that everything goes as planned. But real life does not follow a bulletin. In a large and very formal church a particular woman visited one Sunday who just was definitely not with the program. She kept shouting out "Amen," during the sermon. One of the ushers hushed her, but she kept shouting "Amen" until finally the usher approached her and, in a loud whisper asked, "Madam, what are you doing?" "I'm praising the Lord," she said. To which he responded, "Well, church is no place for that sort of thing."

The good news is I do not believe anyone has gone that far here at St. John's and I certainly don't worry that anyone will. For you see this sermon is not about past, present or future worship wars but is about the different ways we praise – the exact request for this message. As soon as I remembered that the more settled I became with the topic and the easier the sermon flowed – which is always a good thing.

I think when I finally made the distinction between praise and worship in my own mind the more comfortable I felt. Unfortunately, I think too often we think those two words are synonymous or worse yet separate one style of worship from another. For example, in the midst of all the worship wars people have

tended to call fast or contemporary songs praise and slow songs or hymns worship which is not accurate – at least in my humble opinion.

According to dictionary.com – worship is defined as honor, reverence or homage paid to God while praise is the offering of grateful homage in words or song, as an act of worship. I know this is a very simplistic way to put this and could and probably will be debated among many of you as it is on the internet but I believe that praise is part of our corporate worship be it traditional or contemporary . In other words, worship is more than praise but praise is certainly an important and integral part of our worship.

In fact, I was amazed and thrilled to find in my preparation for this morning that according to the Old Testament and particularly Psalm 145 – our scripture for this morning – there are distinct ways that we can and should praise God. Just like there are multiple words and definitions for love in the scriptures – at least four - there are seven different words and descriptions for our praise of God as well. So for the rest of this morning's message we are going to take a brief look at all seven ways to praise in an attempt to celebrate them, practice them or maybe even adopt them for the very first time.

The first one I want to talk about is *Zamar* which means to touch the strings or parts of a musical instrument to make music. As you can clearly see it does not specify what instrument. In fact, it includes any instrument that glorifies the Lord. I have been blessed to serve in six other churches besides St. John's – all with their share of good music and musicians but none quite as amazing as those who help us praise God every Sunday morning here at St. John's. Be it on the

organ, the piano – in spite of the fact that we really need a new one - the drums, guitar, keyboard or accompanied with any number of different musical instruments, I have no doubt that we praise the Lord the way we are instructed to in Psalm 150 which says: Hallelujah! Yes, praise the Lord! Praise him with the trumpet and with lute and harp. Praise him with the drums and dancing. Praise him with stringed instruments and horns. Praise him with the cymbals, and praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.

Next let us consider *Yadah* which means to lift your hands in response to what the Lord has done throughout the land. *Yadah* is an outward and visible sign of what is inside for the entire world to see. It is lifting your hands to the Lord in total submission and devotion. I know this a difficult one for many of us and yet the scriptures are full of encouragement for us to do this very thing.

Lamentations 3:41 - Let us lift up our hearts as well as our hands to God in heaven. Psalm 134:2 - Lift up your hands to the holy place, and bless the Lord. Psalm 63:4 - So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name. Psalm 7:17 - I will give to the Lord the thanks due to his righteousness, and sing praise or *Yadah* to the name of the Lord, the Most High. And the list goes on and on. So next time you feel like you want to lift your hands in worship - whichever service you are in – just do it.

*Shabach* is our next way to praise and believe it or not, it means to shout. Remember the earlier story about the woman in the large, very formal church who was shouting amen. That is *Shabach* - lifting your voice to the Lord and giving praise for what he has done and what he is going to do. It is praise that is

given way before the answer comes about. It is the shout of faith. As the children of Israel were marching around Jericho and her walls, they were told to shout for God had given them the city. They began to shout, before the walls fell down. They shouted praise unto God before they saw the answer. That is, again, the shout of faith.

Next we learn about *Hallel* which is probably one of the easiest to identify and understand. *Halal* is a primary Hebrew root word for praise and the base word for our word hallelujah. *Hallel* means to rave and boast of the wonders of the Lord with excitement and dance. 2 Samuel 6:16 offers a great example of what this means: As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord.

And among all the many other instances of this throughout the scriptures, my favorite comes from Psalm 150 which tells us to always and everywhere praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty firmament! Praise him for his mighty deeds; and praise him according to his surpassing greatness. .

*Tehillah* is the fifth way we praise and means to sing and chant and to praise in the Spirit. It is the combination of singing, shouting, dancing, clapping and rejoicing before and directly to the Lord. This type of praise takes some time. It is where you set aside your watch, phone, schedule and just wait in God's presence. What a time of refreshment this brings into your soul.

Moving on, the next one is called *Towdah* which means to surrender and sacrifice through good times and bad. This is the sacrifice of praise. Isn't it nice to

know that that we can and should still praise the Lord in spite of the fact that sometimes things are upside down in our own worlds. *Towdah* encourages us to praise the Lord, even if you don't feel like it. *Towdah* is praising God in spite the fact your world is in a vice. *Towdah* is praise that pushes through the wall of all adversity. It is an offering that flows to heaven in our time of need.

Psalm 100:4 uses the word *Towdah* when it reminds us to enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Regardless of your circumstance, whether it is good or bad, God is GOOD. Praise takes our focus off of our problem and places it on our good and faithful God. This way to praise God tells us that in every situation we can and should praise God. But for there to be a real sacrifice, something has to die. So, when we offer this sacrifice of praise, we die to our: fears, worries, doubts, anger, offense, frustrations, aggravations, and we put our focus on God above everything else that is pulling our attention away from God. That is *Towdah*.

And finally the last way we praise is called *Barouch* which simply means to bow in the awesome presence of the Lord and all his power - to just be overwhelmed because you hardly can believe that you have been given favor by his Holy Majesty. Every day we need to make sure we offer *Barouch* praise to God where we kneel or bow before him in his presence. It is amazing how this will quiet your heart in the midst of a storm.

Once again there are many instances of this throughout the scriptures but my favorite is Psalm 95:6 that says O come, let us worship and bow down; let us

kneel before the Lord our maker. We will all have the opportunity to do just that in a few minutes as we kneel before God's altar and receive this holy meal.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, I truly believe that we have praised God today! Our worship is not about how well the band played, how great the organ sounded or even how good we feel, but IF GOD WAS PRAISED. From this day forward may we give each other the freedom to worship and praise God without worrying about the person next to you. May we as the gathered body of Christ give one another the freedom to focus completely on God and to be expressive in these various ways today and always. Amen.