

Season after Pentecost - Psalm 150

July 9, 2017

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown MD

Readings: John 4: 24-26; Psalm 150

“Living Doxology”

Grace to you and peace from God - Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen

A man was visiting a church for the first time. He was moved by something the pastor said in his sermon, so with a loud voice he shouted, “Praise the Lord.” Hearing it, a well-meaning member leaned over and tapped him on the shoulder saying, “Sir, we don’t ‘praise the Lord’ here.’ To which another member leaned over and said, “Oh yes we do, we just do it all together when we sing the doxology.”

When I attended my first Lutheran potluck supper, the pastor suggested we sing the doxology as our grace before the meal. I had no idea what he was talking about but everyone else seemed to. Together they sang:

*“Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise him all creatures here below
Praise him above ye heavenly hosts.
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen”*

I wondered where the words were so I could learn it. I wondered why these Lutherans were singing a song with a Latin word title — Doxology. The word doxology is derived from Latin but came down from Greek - doxo = glory/praise, logo - Word. If you look it up in the dictionary, it will say doxology is a “hymn of praise.” When we suggest singing THE Doxology, we are specifically referring to the hymn we just sang. That particular doxology was written by Anglican Bishop Thomas Ken in the late 1600s. He wrote prayers and hymns for the Winchester College community, including hymns for daily Morning and Evening prayers. What we call the doxology was the final stanza for those hymns — the final words of prayer to be sung each morning and each evening.

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The book of Psalms concludes with a similar directive. “Praise the Lord.” Where? On earth and in the heaven. (vs.1) Everywhere. Why praise the Lord? For his “mighty deeds” and “surpassing greatness” – for everything. (vs. 2) Who should praise? “Everything that breathes.” (v. 6) Everyone. How? With all we have. (vs. 3-5) While the psalms were sung in worship, they were meant to be taken to heart so they could be sung in daily life.¹ “So, when we are wallowing neck deep in the mire of life, we are invited to sing the psalms of lament: O Lord, have mercy. When we are experiencing the grace and joy of life, we are invited to sing...: Thank you God! When we are in a tough spot, but remember God's presence, we are invited to say, ‘I trust you O God, you are with me.’ And when we see God at work in the world, we are invited to point to God's invisible hand at work and say, ‘Praise the Lord!’²”

In our world, praise is considered an “atta boy! Good job!” But the praise of Psalm 150 and the doxology is not about giving God a pat on the back. We praise God in gratitude. We praise God to remind ourselves that we are not the source of all that is good in our lives and world — God is. When we praise “who God is... [we] turn our backs on all other gods, all other claims on our lives.”³ We sing the doxology to give God credit when we clearly see the blessings. We sing praises to God in the hard and harsh times of loss and suffering as “a kind of defiant doxology, expressing confidence in God’s providence, God’s reliability, God’s trustworthiness, the conviction, as many of the psalms put it, that God’s “faithfulness endures forever”⁴ – even though we may feel it or see it at the time. Practicing praise keeps us turned toward the Lord and opens our eyes and spirits to God’s grace at work around us and in us.

“Fred Craddock is a minister of the Disciples of Christ Church. He says that one evening, while he was sitting alone on his porch under the stars an idea came to him. It wasn’t a new idea, and it wasn’t his alone. But he claimed it for himself, and “exercised an owner’s prerogative by giving it a name.” Craddock named the idea Doxology.

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He says, “I took Doxology inside to our family dinner table. Supper is family time, and conversation is usually a reflection upon [everybody’s] day... Supper is a good time and pleasant, and the whole family agreed that Doxology belonged at our table.”

Craddock reports that the next day Doxology went along when he and his wife went “downtown for some routine errands, but somehow – with Doxology along – they didn’t seem routine. We laughed at a child losing a race with an ice cream cone, his busy tongue unable to stop the flow down to his elbow. We studied the face of a [homeless person] staring into a jewelry store window, and wondered if he were remembering or hoping for better days. We spoke to the banker, standing with thumbs in his vest before a large plate glass window, grinning as one in possession of the keys to the kingdom. We were delighted by women shoppers clutching bundles and their skirts at blustery corners. It was good to have Doxology along,” Craddock says.

But then, he goes on: “I made a stop at St. Mary’s Hospital to see Betty. Betty was dying with cancer, and the gravity of my visit prompted me to leave Doxology in the car. Betty was awake and glad to see me. I awkwardly skirted the subject of death. It’s all right, she said. I know, and I’ve worked it through. God has blessed me with a wonderful family, good friends, and much happiness. I am grateful. I don’t want to die.

But I am not bitter.” Craddock says, “She was the one who had the prayer. Back at the car, Doxology asked, ‘Should I have been there?’ ‘Yes’ [Craddock said]. ‘I am sorry I didn’t understand.’”

He goes on to say that he took Doxology along when he and his family went on vacation. “There is no question,” he says. “Doxology belongs on vacation.” But when the vacation was over, Craddock got word that his oldest brother had died. He tells of driving to the place where his brother lived, wondering all the while what he would say to his sister-in-law, the widow. He says, “I was still searching when we pulled into the driveway. She came out to meet us, and as I opened the door, still without that word, she broke the silence: “I hope you brought Doxology.”

“Doxology? No,” said Fred Craddock. “I had not even thought of Doxology since the phone call. But the truth is now clear,” he concludes. “If we ever lose Doxology, we might as well be dead.”⁵

The book of Psalms doesn’t simply end in praising God. Psalm 150 tells us that you and I are “to let Doxology – “praise God from whom all blessings flow” – [let Doxology] accompany us every day, so that we will get in the habit of taking Doxology with us wherever we go.”⁶ Into beautiful mornings or bad moments, into celebrations or hospital rooms, we keep Doxology with us to help, to heal, to bear hope in all circumstances. The joy may not come immediately, but Doxology reminds us that “we are — God’s own” (Psalms week1) and even when it feels like Good Friday — Sunday’s coming. One more time — with heart and harmony?

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ENDNOTES

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1. Adapted from Rolf Jacobson's "Commentary on Preaching Series on Psalm: Week 5, "A Call to Praise"
 2. Rolf Jacobson's "Commentary on Preaching Series on Psalm: Week 5, "A Call to Praise"
 3. Anne R. Ledbetter , "An Easter Life" Scripture – Psalm 150" Sermon Preached bSunday, April 7, 2013 as posted on <http://www.wpc.org/uploads/sermons/pdf/April7Ledbetter2013.pdf>
 4. Pastor Kent M. Organ, "Doxology as a Way of Life" Sermon on Thanksgiving Sunday, November 24, 2013 as posted on http://www.firstunitedoakpark.com/files/sermons/Doxology_as_a_Way_of_Life_k_organ_nov_24_2013.pdf
 5. Fred Craddock as recorded, Craddock Stories, Mike Graves and Richard F. Ward, ed. pp. 153–155).
 6. Pastor Kent M. Organ, "Doxology as a Way of Life" Sermon on Thanksgiving Sunday, November 24, 2013 as posted on http://www.firstunitedoakpark.com/files/sermons/Doxology_as_a_Way_of_Life_k_organ_nov_24_2013.pdf