

PSALM 150

¹ Praise the Lord!

Praise God in God's sanctuary;
praise God in God's mighty firmament!

² Praise God for God's mighty deeds;
praise God according to God's surpassing greatness!

³ Praise the Mighty One with trumpet sound;
praise the Holy One with lute and harp!

⁴ Praise the Creator of all with tambourine and dance;
praise the Comforter with strings and pipe!

⁵ Praise the Liberator with clanging cymbals;
Praise the One closer to us than our breath with loud clashing cymbals!

⁶ Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord!

Can you imagine how this psalm is composed to be recited? It begins with everyone singing, and then the second half comes in and with every verse there is a different instrument that responds: first trumpet, and then lute and harp, tambourine and dance, strings and pipe, clanging cymbals, and the finale: loud crashing cymbals! Wow! If anyone came into worship feeling low and this psalm was the one sung, they would definitely have left feeling high, especially if they opened their hearts to feel the words combined with the music and sounds!

And that's the thing about praise. It's meant to be experienced, not just done. Praise is what you do when you're happy. Praise is gratitude amped up. Praise is when words are just not enough and you need music, dance and spontaneous heart-felt tears of joy. A community that cannot praise together is missing out on something.

And this is important for any of us. How much more important it is when we're feeling down. Praise is not about changing the channel and pretending the reasons we are down have disappeared. Praise is not a superficial denial of the sad and difficult things in our world and in our lives. Praise is not escape. Rather, praise is about changing our brain chemistry and empowering us to live in the moment. As we internalize praise, we reset our inner perspective on life and our personal lives. Doors of possibility may open for us internally as we praise and life seems doable again with some hope for what can yet be.

Praise opens our eyes to see what we have not been able to see because we have felt weighed down by the bad and the sad. Praise helps us figure out a way to begin to honour our losses without getting buried by them. Praise allows us to give genuine thanks for people and experiences in our lives, even when there is trauma and sadness attached to the memories. Praise and tears go together, and the tears of sadness can turn into tears of gratitude for the gift of the moment felt, the love that surrounds us and the memories that will always be with us.

Praise is medicine every single one of us needs, and psalms like this one provide us some material – a call and invitation with words, with music and the energy they can nourish...

What do you think? How do you praise? Does our worship become praise for you? We're not always in the place and space for praise. But if we haven't felt praise and done praise for a while, perhaps it's time?...

May you open your heart, give your heart, and surrender your heart the next time you worship... Our style of praise during AHPC worship may not be happy, clappy and jumpy. It's more in the style of a deeper, internal, heart-felt engagement which we may then share as we greet each other and listen to one another in fellowship. May our praise generate compassion as much as joy, and whether we jump up to express it or just feel the warmth of it fill us up inside, may it keep blessing us again and again.

PRAYER: Wondrous God, may I praise you in the morning when I wake and may I praise you in the evening as I prepare to sleep... With my breath, with my heart, with my tears, with my laughter... With my prayer for others and prayer for myself... Flow through me, O God, and make my heart ever-more a heart fit for praising... And I ask this knowing that there are times and seasons in my life when praise is a struggle... Do not forget me in such times, O God... be nearer to me than my very breath... in Jesus' name... Amen.