

PSALM 113

¹ Praise the LORD!

Praise, O servants of the LORD;
praise the name of the LORD.

² Blessed be the name of the LORD
from this time on and for evermore.

³ From the rising of the sun to its setting
the name of the LORD is to be praised.

⁴ The LORD is high above all nations,
and God's glory above the heavens.

⁵ Who is like the LORD our God,
who is seated on high,
⁶ who looks far down
on the heavens and the earth?

⁷ God raises the poor from the dust,
and lifts the needy from the ash heap,

⁸ to make them sit with princes,
with the princes of God's people.

⁹ The Lord gives the barren woman a home,
making her the joyous mother of children.

Praise the LORD!

Psalm 113 is another one of the many psalms of praise. You can imagine from the opening verses: "Praise the Lord!..." that such a psalm is intended for worship, with enthusiastic voices and vibrant instruments. What a feeling of high it must be to recite or sing these words with others publicly. Whatever you may be going through, being with others and sharing such positivity together cannot but lift you up.

And this is, perhaps, one of the key purposes of praise psalms like this one. Not only the chemical positivity expressing praise does to us as individuals, but the "being together" part of it. A lot of people in our society today have become individualized. Our capitalist system only encourages us to make choices and decisions as individuals. We think of ourselves first before we think of how everything about us as individuals, even our tastes and choices, are part of a larger network of relationships – physical, mental and spiritual – that ultimately span the universe. Even though the world was thought of as so much smaller in the psalmist's day, people of that day had a much stronger sense of identity as part of a collective than we do today in our western world.

So what difference does a collective understanding make over an individualistic one when appreciating the message of a psalm like this one? We are being told to praise God in

verses 1-4, and then we are being told why praise to God is so deserving. The psalmist imagines God sitting on some cosmic throne looking down on the heavens and the earth (vs. 5-6). And yet, God is not like any earthly monarch. Far from it. For “God raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of God’s people.” Hierarchy, class and status individualizes and isolates people. It makes them competitive, mistrusting and even contemptuous of others, especially those “lower” than oneself. God’s vision, however, is of those considered the lowest of the low lifted up to a place of equality with the highborn who rule. Imagine what it would be like if we all saw each other as infinitely loved and equally part of God’s creation, called to share and enjoy it. Wouldn’t that life anyone up?!

And then, we read this: “The Lord gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children.” If we read these verses in an individualist way, we are thinking of the woman, like the poor person in isolation, and we can’t imagine that their situation can change other than by some miracle or charity. If the woman remains barren or the poor person remains poor, Isn’t this psalm pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by hope? But what if God’s vision is for a world where the woman is welcomed into community with other children where raising them is a shared responsibility? And what if poverty is dealt with by ensuring a poor person shares a meal with a prince because the food and the table belong to everyone equally?

If our concept of family is expanded to include all creation around us, we recognize isolation and the individualism that creates isolation as the greatest of enemies. We aim for inclusion, especially of those more destitute and struggling with their loss of possibilities. We aim to create openings for shared life, for opportunities to give and receive. Together we raise our children and together everyone is fed. Our priority is to leave nobody out and we will not rest easy until everyone feels included. Does that motivate you? Does that inspire your life with some purpose, even with one other person, creature or plot of soil where you may exercise your loving care because they are part of your family?

Psalm 113 is a call to praise God. We praise God when we sing, play music and create joyful sounds with others. We also praise God by reaching out to those less fortunate than us and struggling in ways we do not. We seek ways to integrate them into community and friendship, sharing of ourselves and our substance. What do you think?

PRAYER: We are made for praise, O God. And we are also made for togetherness with others. Our differences are to be celebrated and enjoyed. Our losses and deprivations for whatever reason of misfortune, accident or failure, are to be shared in compassionate

connection. Perhaps we can only do so much ourselves alone. But something we can do, O God. Inspire us to praise you by reaching out to others as much as we may praise you with our voices. Amen.