

Praying the Psalms: Thou Rising Morn in Praise Rejoice

Psalms 145, 8

A Sermon Preached by Peter Ilgenfritz
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You could see the glow on his face when 14 year old Tallis showed up at dinner that night. He announced, "I have seen the most amazing place I have ever seen."

What we knew is that we wanted to go there ourselves. To see what he had seen. To experience what had lit his face on fire.

And so the next morning our little group took off early in the morning and followed Tallis across the green fields, down the steep hill bank, across the sandy beach, up the other hill. Balanced on the sharp, black rocks all the way around to the far side of the peninsula where we scrambled up the crack in the cliff to a small green hill. Scrambled up through the grass to stand here, on this peak, at the top of the world.

Here: billowing clouds before us, gulls screeching overhead. Here, as if leaning out over the bow of a great ship plowing into the sea before us. It was the most amazing place we too had ever been.

You all have had experiences like this.

When we ask each other where we feel closest to God, where God feels most real and present to us, we often tell each other stories about being in nature.

It is from experiences like this that what Biblical scholar, Walter Brueggemann, calls the psalms of "orientation" were written. The psalms of praise and creation that sing that God is alive. God is right here, right now, with us.

Psalm 145, which the choir just sang, is one of those psalms. Another is Psalm 8. Listen for the Word of God:

O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.

Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.

*You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

These are the psalms that remind us who we are and whose we are. They remind us that we are one with all “this”. God is alive. God is here.

“What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made us little lower than God, and crowned us with glory and honor.” (Psalm 8)

These are the psalms that are the very ground of faith from which the great anthems and hymns of the church have been written.

Beyond seeking and doubting there is this ground, this place of believing.

Walter Brueggemann shared with us,

“Jesus of Nazareth shows that the heart of reality is generous gracefulness that frees me to live a better life, the kind of life that I want to live.”

The heart of reality is “generous gracefulness”.

These psalms remind us that we live in this generous gracefulness of God.

The psychologist Erik Erikson writes that the first thing a baby must learn is trust. A child needs to learn that the world will respond well enough to meet their needs. Not perfectly, but well enough. That there is enough for food, shelter, warmth for the child to rely on. From such trust the seed of hope grows and a child grows and develops.

The Good News for us today is that such trust is within you. Such a ground of trust is in your bones, your breath, your DNA. It is something that has been passed down to you from generation to generation. It is something beyond your remembering that you have learned yourself. Trust.

We can’t “think” our way to that Trust. To find our way back to that ground deep of trust within us we need to go there – to feel it, touch it, experience it. We need to find our way back to it.

There are many reasons people bike to work. I bike to work each day because of my faith. I bike as a response to that generous gracefulness in which we live. I need to touch and feel that generous gracefulness in which we live each and everyday. In the sweat and sun, in the cold and driving rain I need each day to find myself in this place, this ground, this presence of God that I find outside every day.

At my best I am a painter. I sit, I watch, I pick up my pen, take out my paints. My breath slows. I am present, here, now.

At your best you stop and watch the birds chase the cat across the lawn. You kneel in the dirt and pull weeds, you sing, you sit and play an instrument. You get outside for a walk, you breathe and know this ground of trust: God is alive, God is here. You go to church. You have told me that again and again, "I am at my best when I go to church." For no matter how you feel coming here, you have to sing the doxology every week,

*From all that dwell below the skies,
Let the Creator's praise arise: Alleluia! Alleluia!*

No matter where you are or how you feel, you are brought back to remember and sing of this ground of trust and faith in which we live. If that is where you are today, soak it in, take it in. Take it in as a long, cool drink. For you know you won't always be in this place. Soon enough you will have to figure your way down the mountain which will be a story in itself. But for right now, stop, take this in, breathe this in deeply.

And if this is not where you are today, I hand you the end of a rope swing.

Last week I was with twelve of our middle school and high school boys and their leaders at our annual boy's retreat. Camp Indianola has a marvelous rope swing. A line stretched between two telephone poles and a long rope coming down. To get to the rope, you need to climb up a set of stairs to a platform about 5 feet off the ground. But when you are standing there it feels like 80 feet off the ground! To get on to the rope and fly out on it, you need to take one small jump onto the disk at the end of the rope.

It is terrifying to make that one tiny jump – I screamed the first time I did it and the kids heard me all the way down on the beach.

We spend much of our lives standing on that platform.

Spinning in seeking another way out.

Doubting that we can do this.

We spend much of our lives spinning in anxiety and fear, restlessness and worry, and a whirl of questions.

Today, the psalmist looks you in the eye and says, "Jump".

This is the time to take that one small jump.

To hear the voice yelling, "I love this!" and realize that it is yours.

This is the day that God has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.